DECEMBER 23rd ISSUE, 1926
VOL. LX No. 6

ADVENTURE

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Adventure

December 23rd

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(Registered U. S. Patent Office)

Issue of December 23

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, *Editor*

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

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How "Mad" *was* Anthony Wayne?

THE PENNSYLVANIA LINE

by Wilkeson O'Connell

A SENTRY was pacing in front of the small stone house that looked like a jail and was brigade headquarters at Morristown, in New Jersey, for the winter of 1781. His post lay between the hitching-rack, in front of where the burned barn had stood two years before, and a caisson that dripped in the thawing New Year's night, some yards to the left of the dwelling. And he walked this post with the indifference of one who had known many worse ones. Suddenly he stopped and cocked his head to listen to other footsteps than his own that were squelching in the slush of the road from camp. He challenged, sharply, ritually.

"Friends," growled a dull voice in answer.

"Advance, friends, to be recognized!" ordered the sentry, in the same manner as before.

"Aw, go to the ——!" came the growl again, and three doubtfully uniformed figures shambled into view from around the nearest bend in the road.

They walked with the slinking woodsman's slouch, carrying their rifles—the only efficient looking part of their accouterment—with an easy lack of embarrassment, as if these were a natural part of themselves. They straightened instinctively at the sentry's "Halt!" but as quickly resumed their characteristic slouch on the subjoined warning.

"Yes, you'll fire like ——!" snarled the long, hollow-cheeked, hollow-chested nervous-eyed man whose name was Riddle. "We ain't no Britishers, and ye know it!"

"Where's the general?" growled Barstow, who was broad-shouldered, broad-browed, generous-handed, and prematurely grizzled. He appeared to be a hale though overburdened man of sixty. He was, in fact, not yet in his forty-fifth year.

The third man was blond and square, a Pennsylvania "Dutchman"; for which reason his name, Holtzburg, was German. On recognizing them the sentry grounded his rifle and answered Barstow's query like a human being, instead of a military automaton.

"He's out making New Year's visits—left about three this afternoon. Captain Ryan's within, howsomever." The sentry's tones sank as if he feared the aide-de-camp, who could be seen writing at a deal table through the curtainless, candle-bright windows, might hear him. "Will ye step inside and speak with him?"

"Nope," said Barstow. "Our business

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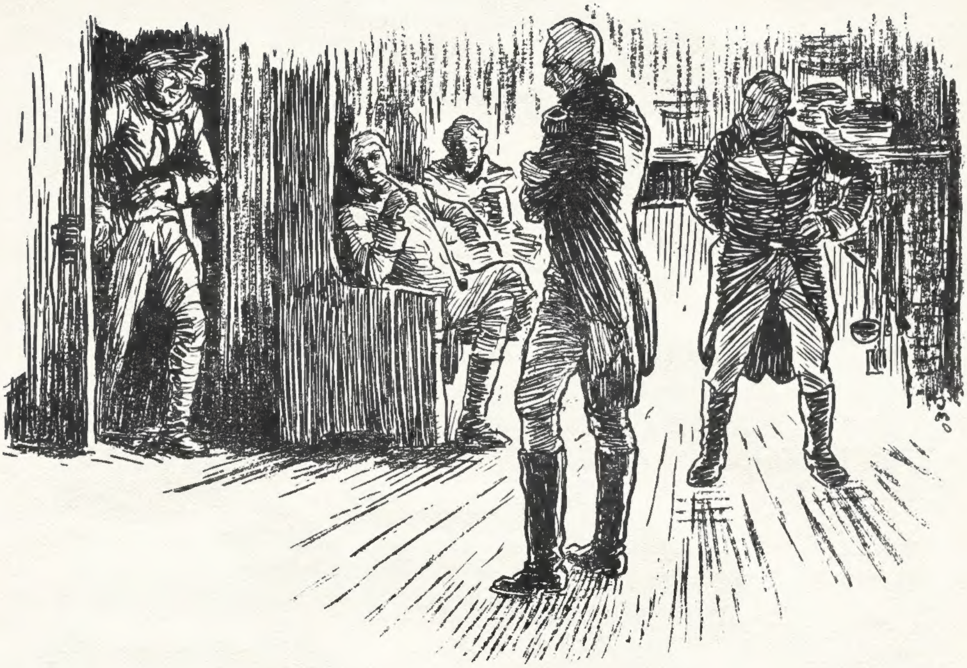


is with Wayne himself, and no one else will serve. We'll wait. When'll he be back, d'ye think?"

"Right soon, I reckon," replied the guard. "I been walking this danged post for several hundred hours since sunset, so it must be nigh supper-time now."

"And, of course," sneered Riddle easily, "ye can count on him being back for rations."

"Well, and if he is," the sentry rounded on him angrily, "they'll be no more nor better than what ye'll draw yourselves!"

"Dot's true," said the Moravian solidly.

"Yes, and this is true, too!" snapped the sentry. "His wife sent him a turkey, the night past, for a New Year's gift, but, when they rode off to the hospital this morning, the orderly was a-carrying of it. The staff had hog and hominy at two, just like the rest of us."

There was a moment's pause, and then Riddle acquiesced as easily as he had sneered. He was notable for an agile mind.

"Ay, Anthony's always taken what was served, whether it were pudding or shot."

"And there's no denying that he's labored to get us what we ought to have," conceded Barstow. "'Tain't no fault of his'n that things have come to such a pass."

"Ye'll be a deputation, then?" asked the sentry with anxious interest. "I thought I heard a deal of shouting a while back."

"Ay, we be a deputation," said Riddle, nervously important, "from the six regiments of the Pennsylvania Line, regularly elected and app'inted in meeting assembled to come afore Anthony Wayne, and lay the facts of the case afore him."

"Dot's true," nodded Holtzburg.

"And the facts of the case is this," said Riddle: "Anthony Wayne, or no Anthony Wayne, we ain't a-going to be come Yankee over no longer!"

"And dot's true, too," said Holtzburg.

"I'm a-going to tell Anthony Wayne," went on Riddle, "that the men of this Line ain't a-going to eat hog and hominy, *hog and hominy*, HOG AND HOMINY--till they never want to fatten shoat again!"

"There's another man from my company down with scurvy," said Barstow. "If they start a-dropping teeth now, what'll it be like come the end of the winter?"

"Sure, it's this unseasonable weather," said the guard. "Green Christmas, many graves."

"Ugh, lean forage fills them graves," grunted Riddle. "'Tain't the weather, for which I'm main grateful, considering there ain't but one blanket to three men in the 6th. We're sitting up of nights about the fires."

"And look at them boots," invited Barstow, thrusting a foot into the light that streamed from one of the deep-set windows. "Just look at 'em, I ask ye! How'd you know it were a boot if 'tweren't on a foot?"

"Oh, I don't know!" said the guard disparagingly. "There's a deal more to them uppers than there is to mine."

"And you're not scruntching 'round on bare ground yet, like me," said Riddle. "Fact is, I'll trade mine for your'n—what'll ye say now?"

"Nothing at all to ye," said Barstow, without a second glance at the straw and string that composed Riddle's foot-gear. "But I'll make a trade with Holtzburg, if he's on."

"He ain't!" stated the Dutchman. "Not vhile he's alive to valk in his own. Dose are good boots. I finish dem off only vone veek ago. I beg der hide from Ant'ony, himself, vhen dot draft ox die, and I skin der ox, and I tan der leader, and I cobble dese boots and anoder pair like 'em!"

Three voices were raised by a single thought—

"What did ye do with t'other pair?"

"I sell 'em to Johnny Horloch for twenty of dose paper dollars," said Holtzburg. "But dose paper dollars don't buy noding hardly. I vas a fool to take 'em."

"Johnny Horloch lies main ill in the hospital," reflected Barstow. "He'll have a phthisic, likely."

"No—is that so?" said the sentry, suddenly interested. "What's his regiment?"

"The same as mine," answered Barstow significantly. "And we was always main good friends into the bargain."

"But, of course," said Riddle discouragingly, "ye must count on the surgeons— —— body-robbers, all of them!"

"But he might give the boots away first," said Barstow.

"Dot's true," said Holtzburg.

"What's his uniform like?" asked the sentry; but now he inquired idly, no longer interested, like Riddle discouraged by the competition disclosed.

"A good bit like mine," said Barstow, "but maybe two thoughts more ragged, and lacking a shirt at all."

"That's another p'int I mean to take up with Anthony," said Riddle, spitting with as much unction as if he had real tobacco between his teeth. "How the —— does he expect to have a decent appearing corps, when he goes and bobs our coattails till we look like a pack of rat-terriers? He does it to get material for patches, he says; but we ain't give no needles or thread with which to sew on the patches, after he's gone and cut our coats for us. 'Twould be a disgrace to the uniform, so 'twould; only, due to the old patches, there ain't none left—hardly. Leastwise, nothing you could rightly call *uniform*. Why, if Holtzburg, yonder, was to meet up with a British patrol some fine day when he was out a-foraging, they'd string him up for a spy, like as not, for wearing scarlet. And could ye rightly blame 'em?"

Holtzburg grinned and patted his flanks, which glowed gloriously in the square of cross-barred, yellow candle-light that fell from the window. Patches, undeniably cut from a captured coat and sewn thickly on breech and coat-skirt, kept the thrifty Moravian warm and comfortable at the enemy's expense. His comrades were envious because less ingenious.

Barstow shifted restlessly in his broken boots.

"Seems like he's mighty long away," he he said to the guard, while he peered through the murky night down the road that led to Morristown. "D'ye guess he's got wind of what's up, and is staying out of purpose?"

"Might be," said the sentry doubtfully. "Though Wayne don't go about to dodge much, as a general rule. Wade in and shove her over is his notion of doing things."

"Well, if he knowed what I was a-going to say to him," began Riddle, but the sentry cut him short.

"—— take what you're going to say to him! He knows it all aforehand and he's already done all that mortal man can do to get supplies. But them penny-pinching dunderheads in Congress don't pay no more 'tention to him than he will to you, so ye may as well go back to your huts and save your breath to cool porridge."

"Dot's true, I guess," admitted Holtzburg.

"Saving we ain't got no porridge," said Riddle.

"And dot's true, too," said Holtzburg.

"And Wayne's got friends in Congress," said Barstow, "high up men like Dr. Franklin, and President Reed, and Medico Bush. And 'tis well known that the Council of

Pennsylvania will do more for Wayne than they would for Washington. Sure, he might work on 'em to grant us our pay, at least. 'Tis eleven months since I've seen the color of their greenbacks, and there's money coming due on my farm in March."

"Vill you be able to pay it vid dose paper dollars dey pay us in?" inquired Holtzburg.

"Curse the dirty Tory who holds the deed!" said Barstow ominously. "I'll see him tarred and feathered, if he refuses the payment."

The sentry shouldered his rifle and prepared to resume his post.

"Well," he said, "take my word or leave it, as ye please, but I tell ye true, you'll only raise Anthony's dander with a deputation right now. And he can't do nothing more than he has done, nohow."

"Dot's vhat Fallen says, too," said Holtzburg, in his heavy German drawl.

The sentry looked at Riddle, who nodded.

"Says the only thing for us to do now is to go over Anthony's head and appeal to the Congress direct."

The sentry again grounded his rifle and whistled softly.

"Glory be, but that *would* set Wayne wild!"

"Reckon it would," said Barstow. "So we voted to try a deputation to him first."

"But what else are we to do," argued Riddle, "if he don't grant us nothing tonight?"

"Fallen 'll tell you," said the guard sourly. "What call has he to be speaking in meeting at all? He takes a deal on himself, considering the small time he's served with the Line, and his being a rank foreigner to boot!"

"He's a smart man, is Fallen," said Barstow, peering intently down the road.

"Dot's true," said Holtzburg.

"With book learning back of him as well as good sense," said Riddle. "And what he's backing now is main good politics."

"Well, he don't get no vote from me," stated the sentry, prognathous. "He's the mouthiest lawyer in camp, everlastingly letting out his voice over one thing or another! But ye'll notice there's one topic he's mighty danged quiet on—that's himself."

"Oh, he's all right!" reiterated Barstow impatiently. "Ain't Wayne ever going to come?"

"I ain't denying that he's a brave man and a smart soldier," the sentry pursued the theme of Fallen. "But I do say I'd listen to him a deal easier in my mind, if I knowed more about him, and less of what he says he thinks."

"Well, there's worse talk than he's giving us going 'round camp already," said Riddle.

"Dot's true," said Holtzburg.

"Treason—nothing short of it," said Riddle. "And things is so bad that something's *got* to break soon, for flesh and blood can't endure the way we go on at present! And I've come to the point where I'm for following Fallen, if Wayne won't give us no satisfaction."

"Well, the way I see it is this," said the sentry: "What Fallen is urging has a mighty ugly ring to it, and is likely to end by getting somebody hung high as Haman—"

"It can't possibly," denied Riddle. "Not the way he's got it planned out. For it stands to reason that they won't hang the whole of the Pennsylvania Line, seeing as how they'll need us some other time for cannon fodder."

"Stands to reason, too," rejoined the sentry, "that it'll set all them as is in power against us forever after. Wayne's our friend now, but how long'll he be that, if this —— foreigner goes over his head to Congress? Ye know what Anthony's like, when his dander's raised. They don't call him 'mad' for just his crazy boldness."

"I'm past worrying," said Barstow, his eyes belying the words. "All we got to do now is to deliver the message from the meeting when Wayne comes back. Is that him, now?"

"Naw!" said Riddle, squinting through the thin light from a crescent that slipped between the light clouds overhead. "That's only Jemmy, the 'Commodore,' with a new bandage 'round his cracked head. Wonder where he's been roving this time? I haven't seen him hereabouts for nigh three weeks."

It was a grotesque figure that was bearing down upon them. A breathing scarecrow of a man, long, and as loosely hung, as a jumping-jack, clad in such rags that the others' uniforms appeared whole and respectable by comparison. The lantern jaw was blue, and curiously clean, save for a smear of dried blood leading from the bandage; and the one dark eye gleamed with a light that might have been malice, madness, or the keenest, most ironic intelligence. He sloshed indifferently through the slush of the road's center, waving his arms in gangling, mocking, unintelligible gesture; and, in answer to the sentry's formal challenge, cut a caper high above the puddles, while thumbing his nose at all ritual and authority. The others, also, although less picturesquely, freedom-frenzied, were neither shocked, pleased, nor surprized by the exhibition of disrespect. They regarded him as a sort of "natural," and considered his conduct becoming enough for such as that.

Officially he was listed as a private in the Continental Armies, but, mysteriously beyond rule and regulation, he pursued his own sweet and irreverent way from one starved brigade to the next; a pass from Wayne in his pocket, that he no longer needed to produce, so familiar had his battered figure become to every man on guard. By all he was admitted to be a good man and a brave one, in spite of his military failings; and, by a few of the most intelligent, a strange history was surmised behind his strange existence.

For sometimes he slipped into a curiously cultivated accent that showed he had learned his Latin once, and, when he passed into the British lines, he wore the scarlet and sabre-tache of an English officer as if easy in them from long usage. And while he freely dispensed invaluable information, which he had procured at the risk of his neck, to the American commanders, no one of them ever heard anything concerning Jemmy, himself, not even his friend and protector, Wayne. His naval nickname was the least of the mysteries that surrounded him.

Now he leered and chuckled as he replied to Riddle's natural query regarding his head-gear.

" 'Tis a New Year's gift, give me by the bloodybacks, for to be showing their great regard for meself," he explained. "Nay, it's but a crease in the scalp—praise be to God, who never taught the British how to shoot. How are ye making out, in these parts and these times? They're saying in York that the Jersey Line does be that close to mutiny that ye'd be hard put to slip a greased blade betwixt the two of them."

"And is that all they're saying in York?" asked Barstow with gloomy significance.

"Och, not at all!" replied the Commodore. "But I was never believing the like of *you!* Is it a fact, then?"

"Not yet," answered Barstow. "But likely to be so soon. Yes, very likely."

"Tut, and I'm ashamed of ye!" said Jemmy sanctimoniously. "Sure, and you're no worse off than the rest of the army, and a —— sight better than they be in York, where things are frightful, what with the last raid on the border, and the doings of the cowboys along the Hudson."

"Well, if they'd only treat us less like dogs here," said Barstow in sullen self-defense, "there'd be no complaint." Then, as Jemmy appeared incredulous, he added, "Leastwise, there'd be no talk of mutiny. We're only after our rights—what we was promised when we 'listed."

"In course, there's a power of complaint everywhere," acknowledged Jemmy reasonably. "And I heard none bitterer than from the country-folk right here in Jersey. They're sore pressed, for after the British had requisitioned every grain that wasn't hid from 'em, along come the Continentals and took the rest. Didn't even leave seed-corn for the spring sowing."

"Well, I could 'a' told Washington," began Riddle, "soon as that order was issued, that 'tweren't good politics to send out foraging parties. I knowed it would only set the country-folk again' us, and—"

"Ugh!" grunted Barstow. "We'd be living on a deal less'n hog and hominy, if them foragers hadn't been sent out. Folks hereabouts ain't a-volunteering no aid to neither side. Heaven'll help them as help themselves."

Holtzburg smiled reminiscently.

"I helped mineself to a good fat turkey at dot big Tory farmstead dis side of Middlebrook; but," he heaved a sigh of fond regret, "it only last me two days."

"So now you're planning to help yourselves some more," said Jemmy cryptically. "Well, here's hoping that ye get what ye deserve."

"What's the news from the north, Jemmy?" asked Barstow, "if that's where you're from."

Characteristically, Jemmy made no acknowledgment of where he was from, as he answered cheerfully:

"Bad. The news is main bad from everywhere. In New England they're quite enough, but fair weary of the war. Red Roger's got Connecticut beating every night there's a moon bright enough for him to make a raid by. And west of there, 'tis sheer awful! There's short rations in New Windsor, and starvation all about it; there's wet scalp-locks in Canada, and living skeletons in the New York churches; there's red ruin along the Mohawk, and black ruin up and down the Hudson, but none of them's the ugliest thing I hear tell of in York."

"What d'ye mean, Jemmy? What are ye hinting at now?"

Barstow stirred uneasily, and the pacing sentry, catching the last words, grounded his gun again while he paused to listen.

"Mutiny?" breathed Riddle.

"Mutiny's but a trifle," said Jemmy contemptuously, "to the treason that's whispered of in every tavern between Philadelphia and Albany!"

"Treason!" echoed the sentry.

"Or what looks main like it," said Jemmy, squatting down on the doorstep while he chewed on a sodden straw. "Wherefrom, are ye asking? Where does any misfortune blow from? The north, in course."

"Ye mean Ethan Allen?" asked Barstow. "And his Green Mountain Boys?"

"You're after hearing the rumor, then, down here in Jersey?" Jemmy answered like a New Englander.

"Only that he shows far fonder of the British now, than he did afore he was their prisoner," said Riddle.

"Dink of it!" murmured Holtzburg. He seemed pleasantly shocked, rather than angered, by the threatened infidelity. But the guard was the reverse of indifferent, muttered surlily something to the effect that what the hero of the New Hampshire Grants needed most, for what ailed him, was a dose of cold iron, "if so be one could come at him to give it." Barstow seemed not to have heard. He stood staring, and poking with a naked toe at a rut that gleamed mellowly in the light from the window.

"And have ye been hearing aught," gossiped Jemmy, "concerning Floyd Allen—'Tory' Floyd, ye recall, who 'listed with the Britishers before independence was declared and hath clung tighter to the King than he hath to his brothers, outlaws or other sorts, ever since?"

"No," said Riddle, shaking his head. "I never even heard tell of him afore, at least as I remember."

"Dot's funny," said Holtzburg. "I t'ought everybody knowed dot Eden Allen weren't der only one of der tribe to have a price set upon his head. I've heard of der Tory broder a score of times, vhen ve vas in York last vinter, but only as how Eden and Ira set a price on *his* head, and run him out of der Grants vid no more pity dan if dey had been of no kin to him at all."

"Would ye be knowing him if ye caught a sight of him?" asked Jemmy.

With one accord the Pennsylvanians shook their heads.

"He's a long, thin man," said Jemmy, "with a hawk's beak above the lean, hard jaw of him, and an eagle's eyes that it seems like ye can't get away from. A young man yet, though he's lived hard, and the hair is frosting over his temples. But ye could tell him best by his gift of gab. Like all the Allens, he has a great conceit of his own vocabulary. Lord, how the man will talk!"

"Well, there's none of that description 'round here," said Barstow. "Is it him that's bringing the bloodybacks into the Grants?"

"What I don't know I'm not saying," intimated Jemmy darkly. "What I say is that when I was in York, a time or two behind me, I heard talk wherever I was resting me foot of how Tory Floyd was riding, bold as brass and free as air, up and down the Grants in the full face of noon. And it was suspicioned, by more'n one, that he was raising a new partizan corps for the King, with no waste of time nor small success."

"And that without let or hindrance from his brothers?" demanded Barstow uglily.

"Devil a bit, at least that I am hearing of," said Jemmy. "What Ethan says is fair law in the Grants, since he got back from the British prisons, and Ethan's saying whatever Ira's telling him, and Ira— Faith, but that little man has a brain too big for his times and country!" Jemmy paused to admire it silently.

"——ed traitors!" snarled Barstow, and the guard echoed the sentiment. Jemmy raised one pented, questioning eyebrow. "Well, ye know as well as I do, Jemmy, that if the Grants go over to the enemy, there'll be nothing left 'twixt Washington and Carleton, in Canada, but a bit of bad traveling! Just as there's nothing between him and Clinton but them pesky little Highland strongholds—weakholds they might better be called! Lord, if Sir Harry should ever guess of their true nature!"

"Then he'd think 'em not worth the moving on!" said Jemmy in scorn of the man he, himself, had fooled a score of times. "But I'm glad you're awake to the full iniquity of letting the enemy have free passage through Lake Champlain. In course, when it comes to a little private mutiny of your own, though it may be just as embarrassing to the commander-in-chief and enheartening to the bloodybacks, still it's not to be called 'treason' nor no other harsh names. Oh, no! Then it's 'our sacred rights', and 'hardships no other brigade is required to endure', and 'solemn covenants solemnly entered into', and—"

"Curses on ye, but that's no more'n the truth!" cried Barstow indignantly. "We only want what was promised us!"

"We got it written down in black and white," said Riddle. "'Twould hold in any court in the land."

"Dot's true, Jemmy," confirmed Holtzburg.

"Oh, go to the —— and shake yourselves!" exploded Jemmy petulantly. "Ye haven't the wits of a hen with her head off! But Anthony will put ye to the right-about!— Here he comes to do it. *Vale*, Wayne! More power to you!" And he saluted into the murk moonlight in the Roman fashion.

On a bend of the road some fifty rods away the crescent showed the man for whom they waited. He rode a blood horse of his own breeding at the head of a little cavalcade of officers variously mounted. They were coming gaily, laughing and talking, their cloaks flying loose in the soft, thawing night. Obviously they were in a holiday mood, forgetful or careless of their manifold misfortunes.

"Clear yourselves out of this, now!" ordered Jemmy, with an exaggerated insolence. "Me and Anthony have some inportant matters to discuss and settle between us, and we can't be bothered by the likes of you. Besides, ye ought—if all I'm hearing of his recent spasm of orders be true—to be now sleeping the slumber of innocent babes in your snug little huts. Me advice to you is to be making tracks, many of them, before Bittings catches ye out, and commences to twist your little tails for ye."

There was a three-fold look of consultation betwixt the delegation.

"He's like to be more—patient, sort of—if Jemmy gets to him first," said Barstow.

"'Tis always poor politics to interfere with Jemmy," reflected Riddle.

"Dot's true," said Holtzburg.

"It is," said Jemmy; whereupon the three of them moved inconspicuously off to the end of the muddy yard, where they leaned in a corner of the snake fence in huddled patience.

The horsemen swept around the last turn in the road and pounded down on the small, stone house, splashing wide the slush, as Jemmy had done. He and the sentry drew back from the flashing hoofs as the horses milled in the space before the door. A number of grinning grooms, black as the shadows from which they jumped and ragged as fringed gentians, appeared to lead off the mounts that blew and steamed into the murky night. The door was flung open from within, and Jemmy touched the arm of the man who stood revealed in its stream of light.

He was thirty-six years of age this New Year's night, but he was not a young man; for eighteen years of public service do not leave a man young. But they had not made an old man of Wayne, either. His waist, under the broad shoulders, was still slim as a woman's and his hazel eyes sparked or sparkled with his swiftly changing moods above a small, markedly resolute chin and the full, mobile lips. He looked as hard as a pine knot, and was considerably tougher than leather. Under ordinary circumstances his men adored and trusted him, although his byname was that of the most reckless commander in the Continental Armies. He repaid their devotion by a fussy care for their well-being that extended from the hut-house to the field of battle, although it was past his power to make it reach into the halls of Congress. And even now, in their present distress, he was turned to once more, although most were convinced that he could not, if he would, remedy the present wrong.

Now he turned to recognize the Commodore.

"Ah, there, Jemmy!" he said, a faint anxiety, rather than surprize, tinging his low, resonant tones. "I've been expecting you for this fortnight past. Is all well in New Windsor?"

"Well?" queried Jemmy. "Nothing's well nowhere, but it's no worse there than it has been. I carry dispatches from General Washington." And, in spite of himself, Jemmy's habitual irreverence lifted to something near respect, as he named the commander-in-chief.

Wayne took the papers as he asked: "How did you come by that bandage? Come in and tell me the news, while Surgeon Havermeyer re-dresses it for you."

It was an order, but Jemmy chose to regard it as a polite invitation.

"There's nothing I'd like better, and thank ye kindly, sir, but the boys in camp are for a little New Year's party of their own, and I'm off to be of the company before they begin rolling them too high and wide for safety and decency."

"Nonsense!" said Wayne, one boot on the threshold. "You must come in and make your report. I want to know what deviltry is brewing beyond Crown Point, so I can take the proper precautions—"

"Faith, and there's worse brewing right here in Morristown!" interjected Jemmy. "Let you be taking precautions against *that*, and leave the north to me and his Excellency. I'll be back to tell ye all the news by reveille—and dead sober, I promise ye—but there's other fish a-frying now, and I must see to the turning. God keep ye, merry gentlemen—may the New Year find ye still undismayed."

"Catch a hold of him, there, Farquar!" ordered Wayne of his junior aid; but, with a wiggle and twist, the Commodore eluded all hands and swiftly gained the open road to camp. From the ruts he turned to salute them too respectfully, and then flopped and fluttered off through the slush, mockery and purpose in every line of his tatterdemalion figure.

"Well!" said Wayne, looking after him. "This is cursedly encouraging for the first day of a new year. Nothing good nowhere, but worse here than anywhere else. And the worst is that I fear me he's right! A cheerful soul is Jemmy, but as willful as he is useful. Come you in and drink on it, gentlemen. Ryan has, as he himself would say, an elegant egg-nog mixed for us."

II

IN THE rudely wainscoated, candle-lit parlor, they gathered around a mighty mixing bowl, a-brim with the drink that was served on New Years. They were a greatly varied group of men in regard to rank, age, and condition previous to hostilities, but all were now equally shabby, hardened, and devoted to Wayne and the commander-in-chief above him. And all were, at the moment, still heart-lifted by the holiday mood in which they had come, helped to it, it may be, by the bowls of egg-nog already consumed in the course of the New Year visiting.

After the first toast had been given—"The Army, gentlemen, God help us!"—Wayne sat down on a settle beside the noisy, social fire of hickory logs to open Jemmy's packet. With the first line, he became deeply absorbed, taking no part in the general conversation proceeding about him.

"Faith, and if Clinton," began Captain Ryan, the senior aid, apropos of the toast, and ladling out another round of cups as he spoke, "only knew the straits we were in—"

"—he'd sit tight in New York, as usual!" finished Colonel Stewart of the 6th, a lean and whitening Scotsman, with a thin mouth that seemed to be pinched shut, by the will of its owner, lest it suddenly *ha-ha* at the sorry experience he had known as life. A pessimist born and bred, he had lost a family in the French and Indian War, three toes in a campaign in Canada, and had been a prisoner in New York. He had learned always to expect the worst, and had but seldom suffered a disappointment. In the present exigency, his only hope lay in Clinton, the hostile commander, whom he knew and could trust to be always a fool.

"Bless the Dutch lasses of the major's native city," said Philip Farquar, a boy from Maryland, with the soft speech of one who comes from a Southern State, and four years of very active service behind his nineteen-year-old back, "who so ably occupy his Excellency's attentions."

"'Tis a patriotic service," averred Major Van Kuren of the battery, who had been transferred, on Wayne's request for an artilleryman, from the New York Line. "They do so solely for the purpose of distracting those attentions from ourselves."

The Yorker spoke with a peculiar utterance. Not an accent, so much as a forced and voluntary preciousness, a curiously conscious mannerism of speech, as if he listened to each word as it fell from his lips. Yet in nothing else did he affect the fine gentleman, being bluff and good-natured to a superlative degree. He was watched by the "goslings" (as Wayne referred to his military family) as a sleepy hound is watched by a pair of wide-awake puppies, and he seemed to regard them with an amused, but nervous, apprehension. Which he might well do, for he suffered much and often at their tongues.

"Bless rather, Phil," now said the twenty-two-year-old senior aid, "these —— winters of yours! They're cold enough to keep the very foxes holed till Easter. Small blame to Sir Harry, if he hugs the warm ingles of New York, when God fights so discomfortingly on our side!"

Ryan, like Jemmy, had come from the isle of saints and heroes, having been smuggled across the sea to the rebellious colonies, after a fatal duel with an English officer in Phœnix Park. It had ruined a promising, if somewhat embryonic, career at law; but, once within the American lines, the young Irishman had found an even more congenial profession, in which he had shown marked ability, and been considerably advanced.

By process of mutual attraction, he and Farquar had eventually arrived on Wayne's staff; for that general ever preferred as aids young men of gallant bearing and hardihood, whom he might profitably assist by precept, advice and example in the way that they should go. And, in return, they adored, imitated, and served him faithfully, but feared him not at all. "Goslings" he called these two, but to do the youngsters justice, they were anything but callow. Forced to an early manhood by life, fate, war and Wayne, they had managed to skip that wretched period in a boy's development when he is uneasily conscious of not measuring up to his own day-dreams. Gentlemen born and bred, they were already tried and trusted officers, although they could not sum forty-five years betwixt them.

Colonel Butler, a stout Pennsylvanian, who was Wayne's successor in command of the 4th, now agreed with Ryan.

"Ay, he has deputized his authority to noble Jack-o'-the-Frost, who, though he nips our noses also, is yet our strongest ally."

"Yea," said Captain Bittings, also from Pennsylvania, "yea, he'll lay a siege to Sir Harry that will not raise till the wild geese honk on their way to Canada. And 'tis a mortal pity at that! Think of how, as soon as we get a good fall of it, a red coat will stand out against the snow!" He sighted along an imaginary rifle barrel. "'Twill be like blobs of blood on a fresh bandage—a very Hessian could not miss at such a mark."

Ryan made a hasty movement of distaste, and Stewart shrugged resignedly. Bittings was a strange man, with a queer, strained, repressed manner, and the face of a savage saint; a saint that had been tempted and betrayed by the devil. Born and raised a Friend, he had, at the beginning of hostilities, suddenly denied his faith to become one of the most markedly valorous officers of his native State. But even while his fame was made by his deeds, it was sullied by his manner of doing them. Nothing could be proved, save that once he had taken a Mohawk scalp, but there were ugly rumors of quarter denied; and Wayne continually had to check an undue severity toward the enlisted men. In fact, the ex-Quaker was an awkward problem to his superior officer. Too courageous, too devoted, too influential—through his wealthy, neutral family—to be summarily discharged, he was also too evilly impulsive to be trusted.

"Look at the general's brow," muttered Farquar to Colonel Stewart. "'Tis black as a summer storm. The news must be worse than he expected."

"Treason, at the very least," agreed the Scotsman. "Or maybe an outbreak of smallpox among the French troops."

"It's more likely to be the plague than the other," scoffed Butler, who was an inveterate optimist. "Since Arnold left us, rumors of treason have been so rife that if a man washes his hands at an unaccustomed hour, or spits left of the trail, there is riot and outcry and charges of treason!"

"Wait!" said Stewart, wagging an ominous forefinger. "I grant ye there has been much outcry, but when the noise of it is over, ye will find there has also been some little treason."

"In York alone," said the major, "is opinion split so clean that every man is forced to choose and keep one side only."

"In York, yes, " admitted Stewart, "but east of York?"

"Rumors, rumors!" Butler scouted them.

"Nay, 'tis as sood as gettled," said Van Kuren hastily.

" 'Sood as gettled'?" Farquar raised inquiring brows to Ryan.

"High Dutch, without a doubt," surmised Ryan. "Certainly a strange tongue."

Van Kuren ignored the aside with the ease of long usage, and went, more carefully, on.

"I had letters yesterday from Albany, that informed me that the Allens are in daily communication with Beverly Robinson, who, as you may recall, was Arnold's tempter. And 'tis said that naught but the price to be paid for the Grants is now undecided."

Wayne looked up wearily. His holiday mood was gone, the habitual one of desperate hope replacing it. He had refolded the dispatches, and now flipped them across his open hand.

"These speak of that also," he said. "Somehow, I did not believe it of Ethan Allen! He ever seemed a staunch man, if a trifle crazed. Faith, and you can't trust your own brother in these bad times!"

"But the Grants were petitioning Congress for leave to come into the Union as the fourteenth State of Vermont," objected Butler, "no more than four—or is it five?—months since."

"Oh, yes," shrugged Van Kuren. "They be thrifty folk, unlike Arnold, and mean to knock down to the highest bidder. Not for naught will Beverly Robinson get the Green Mountain Boys and their once outlawed leader, Ethan Allen."

"He's a bold man," reflected Stewart, who had known Allen when both were prisoners, "and a boastful man, and a man the British must have held of high value, since they retained him for three long years in Pevensey Castle and the stinking prison ships."

"And it's no small price that they'll be paying for the other brother, Ira," said Ryan. "Faith, and there's a man of ingenuity! If he be not, in fact, the craftiest were-fox that runs between the hills and Champlain."

"Nor will the rest of the family come cheap," said Wayne. "With their friends and adherents, they form a mighty tribe, and the King will bleed gold for every man of them."

"But when the trick is turned," said the New York major, "when each last, least younker of the tribe is bought and paid for, the British will have bought more than the Grants." He scowled to himself. "The Grants, the New Hampshire Grants, the gateway to the north that belongs of right to New York. —— their Luciferous souls!" His face flushed and his voice deepened with a sudden passion. "Of all the shifty crew I hold Floyd Allen, the open Tory, the most honorable among them!"

Grey Stewart looked quizzically at the ruffled Yorker.

"Ay, and it *is* odd times," he murmured, "when a York man prefers an open Tory."

"Better a Tory than a traitor," said Van Kuren sharply, then he regained his customary, philosophic phlegm. "Ah, well, there's one satisfaction—thrifty Ira will set and get a mortal high price for whatever he has to sell. As the general holds, they'll bleed for it."

"Yet the price asked by the Grants of Congress was reasonable enough," said Stewart. "'Twas no more than to come into the Union free of the claims of you Yorkers and New Hampshire alike."

"And Congress was loon-struck to refuse it them!" ejaculated Wayne. "If so be they did refuse it. One heard no more of the matter after November."

Van Kuren shrugged off his disagreement, and then answered as if with authority:

"They did not wholly refuse it. The matter was dropped till the end of the war at the request of New York, when it may be settled satisfactorily."

Obviously the major meant to the satisfaction of New York, and the Pennsylvanians promptly took exception to this parochial point of view. If the Keystone State had been concerned, their opinion might have been less nationalistic.

"Yes, and in the meantime," pointed out Stewart, "Ira rides weekly into Canada."

"And 'tis said that Ethan refused the employment that Washington offered him," said Butler.

"He was hot enough for any sort once!" added Bittings.

"And thanks to the military situation, if all is true, Washington will be no longer free to release a battalion or two to come to our aid, if so be we need it," summed up the general. "By the way, among other items of interest in his Excellency's letter, is this: it refers, I presume, to those —— Hessians Clinton is rumored to have moved on to Staten Island—'I think your precautions for the security of your camp are very good, though I hope if the enemy have made a detachment equal to report, which says,'—mark this, sirs!—'two thousand to twenty-five hundred, you will be quiet in your quarters—'. . . God and you know, gentlemen, we are in no condition to withstand an attack from two thousand well-armed, well-clothed, well-fed men!"

"And us with a bare thirteen hundred of the reverse," murmured Ryan.

"It's Von Erkheim, all right," said Colonel Butler soberly. "And he's already left Staten Island to cross into Jersey. But we may not be disturbed for all that. A country boy came into camp this noon, and told one of my lieutenants that the Hessians were heading for Marbury, when they left Elizabethtown this morning. And he averred that they intend to go into winter quarters in the former place. What faith may be put in this information, I can not say."

"Jove, and could anything have happened more awkwardly!" demanded Wayne irritably. "Of course, we might have expected as much. Clinton would be mad not to take advantage of our present difficulties."

"Yet it may prove the very thing to end them," said Butler hopefully. "There is never as much discontent when there is a prospect, at least, of action, as when the men have nothing but their miseries to think on."

This was readily acknowledged to be a possibility, as all present had seen the principle in practise often during the latter stages of the war. Wayne named a toast to the leader in New Windsor, "for his Excellency desires the compliments of the season to yourselves, gentlemen," and continued to con the papers. There came a knock at the door, and Captain Bittings, standing nearest, opened to it. Outside the deputation crowded about the doorstep.

"What do you men want here?" demanded Bittings. "'Tis long after tattoo, and well you know that the general's orders are that no man is to leave his hut after that call has sounded."

His tone was not merely insolent. It was unbearable, and the men received it with sullen, silent obstinacy. Then Barstow said, with perfect respect—

"Deputation of the 'listed men to speak with General Wayne, sir."

"Ye can give me the message," said Bittings. "I'll see that it gets to him in due time."

"Deputation from the 'listed men to speak to General Wayne in person, sir," repeated Barstow doggedly.

"Regularly app'inted in meeting assembled," added Riddle.

"Dot's true, sir," confirmed Holtzburg.

"—— the meeting assembled!" said the captain, with frank and heartfelt sincerity. "Can't you see the general is engaged with important dispatches? Give me your message and get along with you!"

Barstow still stood at a strict attention, but his tone was ugly as he said for the third time:

"We be a deputation, sir, app'inted, as Sergeant Riddle says, to come and lay our just grievances afore the general, and we can't go back to camp until it's done."

Bittings' head shot forward, and his lips snarled back from his teeth.

"What!" The word snapped like a black-snake whip into the stillness of the night. "You refuse to obey a direct order—"

"Hold hard, there, Bittings!" came Wayne's voice sharply, and the general rose from the settle. "I am not so deeply engaged that I can not attend to this matter myself." He motioned the soldiers to enter the already crowded little room. "Now, then, Barstow, what is it this time? Rations, quarters, supplies, or pay? I grant beforehand that your grievances are just, but you should know by this time that if they are unredressed it is because I can do nothing about them! After all, you've really less to complain of than usual. It's not near as cold here in Jersey this year as it was in the Highlands last winter." He paused for their reply, his glance keen but not unsympathetic.

"Begging your pardon, sir," said Barstow, "but none of them's what we're after to-night."

"No, sir," said Riddle, "they ain't. It's something new this time, sir."

"Impossible!" cried Wayne, his lip twitching. "One time or another, you've complained about everything in the conduct of the war, till now there can be no new demand for you to make! Your criticisms have reached from the commander-in-chief, whose equal you wont meet in this mortal world below, to the commissary, which I admit is worse than—than—"

"British strategy," suggested Ryan, as the nadir of his experience.

"A campaign in Canada," came from

Colonel Stewart, as he watched the empty tip of his thin right boot.

"Or a Rohawk maid," said Major Van Kuren, without pausing to think as he spoke.

Delightedly the goslings turned on him.

"Ay," drawled Farquar, in bland agreement, "they be terrible objects—Rohawk maids."

"Sure, and there's nothing worse to meet in the dark," said Ryan. "Send the heart leaping like a salmon in a fall—these Rohawk maids."

"Strike you deaf, blind—and dumb—" pursued Farquar, "as soon as look at you—these Rohawk maids."

"Banshees are preferable," said Ryan, "or the basilisk, itself—the monsters!"

"—— take this tisted twongue of mine!" sputtered the major. " 'Tis *M*ohawk *r*aid I meant,—and well ye knew it!"

Wayne turned from the baiting of the fortunately good-natured major, and spoke genially to the grinning deputation.

"Come," he said, "if ye really have some new complaint, out with it! What is it you're after?"

"Our discharges, sir," said Barstow, before Riddle could get his periods under weigh.

"Your discharges!" exclaimed Wayne. "Heyaday, but here is novelty with a vengeance! What will it be next? Would ye not like to have me noose and tie the north wind, while ye warm your backs for a bit? Or maybe catch ye a will-o'-the-wisp with which to play hot-cockles! Don't be bashful, man, speak your mind, and name your wish! Just name it—ye are free to *ask* for anything ye fancy!"

Barstow's eyes fell before the sarcasm, but his chin was thrust as he repeated—

"Come to ask for our discharges, sir!"

"Dot's true, sir," said Holtzburg.

"The time of our 'listment being up," added Riddle, "and us wishful to return to our homes, according to the terms of said 'listment."

"Lord help the man, but he argues like a lawyer!" cried Wayne impatiently. "In the name of heaven, *why* should you think that your term of enlistment is at an end?"

The question was purely rhetorical, but Barstow took it literally. From an inside pocket of his rags he hauled out an equally tattered paper that slit down a crease as he unfolded it.

"Look here, sir," he requested, "here 'tis. Three years ago today, I, and some nine out of every ten men that are left alive in the regiment, 'listed—at your solicitation, sir—in the 4th battalion of the Pennsylvania Line for a period of three years, as is written down in black and white in this here paper, sir. And now we want our discharges, the time being up, and leave to return to our homes, as is written, too."

"Yes, sir," said Riddle.

"Dot's it," said Holtzburg.

"That's it?" snapped Wayne. "Not by a —— sight! You misread the meaning of the text. Look here," he took the sheet from Barstow, and pointed to a certain line. "—right there—you were enlisted for three years, *or*—mark this!—'the duration of the war.' And the war is not yet at an end. Far from it!"

"Hail, Bellona!" Farquar saluted the goddess with a little backward flick of the hand, as if he shook a fall of phantom Mechlin from the cuff of his shiny coat. "Hold thou the end far from us yet!"

"Ay," said big Colonel Butler, "we retreat before defeat even as before the enemy."

"On the contrary," said Stewart, in genial gloom, "we have suffered defeat so often that it no longer holds any terrors for us. It becomes a habit, and troubles us no more than frost-bite or mosquitoes."

"Indeed, we were overwhelmed—vanquished—long since, yet," Ryan shrugged expressively, "we seem to continue to go on being vanquished, but still manage to fight on, too, somehow."

"And will do so," said Stewart, desperately cheerful, "until the odds at last become too great, and not defeat but annihilation overtakes us."

"The odds this day are four to one against us," said Wayne. "And last winter they were seven to one. And if we could—and we did—live through such, we will continue to survive when they are ten to one, twenty to one — or thirty to one, by God!" He refolded the enlistment paper and returned it to its owner. "I'm sorry," he said, "but all I can do for you, in this matter, is to recommend that you go back to your regiments and say to them that it is impossible, under the present, precarious circumstances, to shorten the term of enlistment— You see that, don't you, Sergeant Riddle?" He turned suddenly and directly on the representative of the 6th. "The enlistment being for the duration of the war, and the war still enduring?"

"Yes, sir," said Riddle. "I see it plain enough, when ye put it thataway, sir. Don't ye see it so, too, Holtzburg?"

"*Ach, ja!*" agreed the Dutchman. "But vhen ve 'listed it vas understood der var vould not last dree years."

"No, sir!" Barstow's positiveness verged on violence. "We can't take that word back to the Line!"

"No, sir!" veered Riddle. "I don't reckon 'twould be good politics, sir."

"Nope," Holtzburg backed them both, "it vould not, sir."

"Politic or not," shrugged Wayne, "you'd best take it that way; for it's God own truth that they won't — they can't! — be discharged till end of the campaign, or end of the next one, or even the next to that, it may well be. My Lord, men, don't you see why?"

There was a hectic silence while Barstow refused to see anything save the wide, muddied boards at their feet.

"We've gone so far, Barstow," said his colonel, "that we can't stop, or even halt, now, without wasting all the tremendous efforts of the past six years."

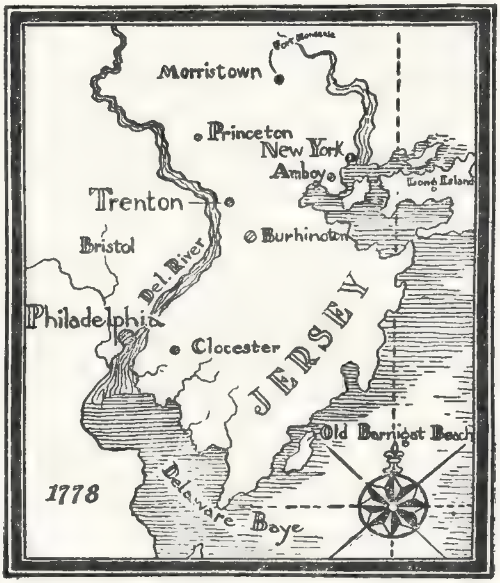
"And well ye know, Sergeant," said Stewart quietly, "what those efforts have cost, for ye have borne every one of them."

"Nor can those efforts be redeemed," said Van Kuren, very carefully, "unless all troops remain as they are at present, ready for any eventuality."

" 'Tis like a game of chess, Barstow," said Wayne, after another minute. "We hold Clinton in check here from the south—or he thinks we do so—while General Washington does likewise from the north. If either of us should be taken, whether by an enemy piece, or merely swept from the board by force of circumstance, it would be only a matter of hours before the other would go too. And the war, at last, be ended—lost."

Barstow's glance was still sullenly cast down, while every eye in the room was fastened on him. The officers watched him with a quiet, keen anxiety; the other sergeants looked to him for their cues. In the waiting silence Bittings, his muzzle twitching nervously, stood clenching his fists with a strange intensity, his gaze fierce beneath his beetling brows. There was a rasp of textiles as Ryan leaned an arm on Farquar's shoulder, followed by a clink when Wayne shifted a spurred boot.

Through the shaft of quivering candlelight, beyond the open door, the sentry passed and repassed with measured regularity. His footsteps could be heard squelching louder and louder through the slush, before he appeared, and then dying slowly into the night again, as he receded from the doorway. Whereupon the drip of the thaw from the eaves would stand out, irregular, unpredictable, clear and startling in the soft silence. The lonesome bark of a distant shepherd dog came to their ears, a candle guttered in a breeze no one could feel, and Bittings' voice broke the calm with a gross challenge.



"And to my mind, Sergeant Barstow, it is a black shame that the Pennsylvania Line should come whining for their discharges, when the enemy is so near that we can all but smell the smoke of their powder!"

There was an agonized intake as all swung to face the savage ex-Quaker.

"Ay, that is the word that should go back to your accursed, mutinous meeting," he pronounced. "Tell them that Wayne, General Wayne, Anthony Wayne of Chester County, has seen a day he never thought to see, when he blushed for the Line of his own State! A shame it is, and so ye should be shamed from your cowardly conduct."

"God, man, do you know what you're about?" breathed Wayne, white to the nostrils, whiter than if he were angry.

"Jove, what a mad misfortune!" Ryan muttered. Barstow burst forth passionately.

"Shame or no shame, we're tired of this bloody war that has no ending! We're sick of eating food that rots the teeth from the gums, and stiff from wearing clothes the snow can sift through! We could stand the marching, and being shot or captured is a matter of luck, but —— if mortal man can hang on forever, just a-squatting in them dank-rotten huts, freezing solid while a-sickening for camp-fever, while the British devour the corn our wives and childer sow! We 'listed to *fight*, not to die of slow torture, nor yet to be bullied by turncoat Quakers, who—"

Bittings sprang forward.

"—— blast the roof from your —— burnt mouth, you stinking—"

"*Bittings!*"

There was a sudden silence in which struggled the two powerful personalities; then, slowly, Bittings came to attention. Wayne turned his agate-hard gaze from the captain onto the sergeant.

"Sergeant Barstow, you are mutinous and insubordinate, sir! Return to camp and give your message as you received it of me. I have nothing more to say."

"Then, by God and His angels, I wont be answerable for the consequences!" cried Barstow, and bolted from the room.

The other deputies quietly saluted and followed him.

"Dot's true," the officers could hear Holtzburg comment on Barstow's last speech.

"'Tain't good politics," came more faintly from Riddle, "and I'm a-wondering what Fallen is a-going to make of it."

"I vonder," Holtzburg could just be heard to ponder, and the rest was lost in a mumble and the distance.

Wayne turned, his eyes terrible with stern wrath.

"Captain Bittings!" he said. "You are under arrest, sir! Your ungovernable tongue and temper have, in all probability, ruined the only chance we had of checking the mutiny from within!"

His eyes fell from Bittings' bloodshot face, and he stood absently twisting the dispatches into a crumpled roll between his fingers, while the anger of his expression faded to one of pure dreariness. Suddenly he sank to the settle again; his head dropped to his clenched fists, and strong shudders shook him from nape to heel, as he croaked dryly:

"God help us! God help us! For all else is turning against us! We even rend ourselves!"

The staff gaped in horrified amazement. Despair in their vivaciously temperamented commander was one of the few misfortunes they were not prepared to face with equanimity.

"I—I—I—" Bittings stammered by the general's side. "Lord of hosts, what's this!"

Wayne raised his head to speak very bitterly, very personally, to him.

"It's not the British who'll defeat us," he said, "even though they fight four to our one. It's the serpent brood we've raised against ourselves. What hope is there for us anywhere?" He flung his hands wide in utter hopelessness. "There is treason, if we turn to the north; defeat and disorder in the south, and starvation here in the center. We've but a week's rations left in camp, and I see no prospect of procuring more; while the very hospital this day is without tea and sugar, thanks to Congressional niggardliness! These are the harder foes we have to contend with. What can a man do against those of his own household?"

His head fell to his hands again, and the staff exchanged painful, embarrassed, questioning glances. Gray Stewart sat down beside him and laid a hand on his elbow.

"Come, Anthony, lad," he said, in his husky Scotch voice, "don't ye take on so over a bit slip of the tongue. If ye lose faith and hope, what is there to sustain the rest of us?"

Wayne looked at the veined, gnarled, warworn hand, but raised his eyes no farther.

"Old friend of my father's," he asked, "how long is it since faith and hope have sustained you?"

"Why, if ye put it that way," admitted the colonel, "a goodish bit, I must confess."

"But consider, sir," said Farquar, "faith and hope are but windy things to fight on."

"What else have you been fighting on then?" asked Wayne, still bitterly downcast.

"Luck, sir," said the boy, in the soft drawl of his native province, "on the most marvelous run of luck that ever turned up on Life's tables!"

"Luck?" said Wayne. "I fail to see how you make that out!"

"Very simply, sir," said Farquar. "For is it not a fact that whenever we have been poised on the very brink of destruction—which happens about once every four months—something has *always* occurred to snatch us back? And isn't that luck, sir?"

Wayne looked up at last, and the tension under which they all were laboring was relieved thereby.

"It's an odd way of considering it," he conceded. "And, certainly, regarded as a run of luck, it has been fearful and marvelous. Yes, you have the right of it."

"Of a surety," said Farquar easily, "and observe, sir, luck of this sort is a deal more dependable than the Christian virtues that Colonel Stewart gets along so nicely without."

"Anthony," complained Stewart, "your aids are beyond hope of correction! I'd best be going back to my regiment, which is probably, thanks to Butler's aspiring sergeant-major, in the same state."

The storm was completely over, and Wayne rose quickly to detain the colonel.

"I thought to have you keep New Year's with us," he said. "Although the fare that we can offer ye is thin enough. We'll have to drink our toasts in rum and water, and at supper fill our bellies with little more than jests. But stay and starve in company with us."

"There's nothing I'd like better," said the gray colonel hyperbolically, and the two men laughed at the doleful joke as they shook hands in honor of the Yule.

Under the same melting influence Wayne turned to his recalcitrant captain.

"Come, Bittings," he said, with frank and cunning generosity, "look not so downcast, man! 'Tis holiday time, and we must do our poor best to be merry. If I said aught to cause you concern a moment since, I completely rescind my harshness now, and you must let it from your mind."

It took Bittings in all his weakest spots. He flushed like a girl and turned on Wayne a glance of inexpressible devotion.

"Oh, sir!" he began, and then slipped into a discarded diction. " 'Tis like thyself! And I, who should be apologizing to thee, not thee to me!"

"Nay, forget it, forget it!" said Wayne testily. "And learn to control your temper, man! 'Tis a fearful one—eh, sirs, and what may that be?"

They held their breathings and watched the night through the door, while a dull, wordless roar of men's voices crept to them through the still air.

" 'Tis the reception, I fancy, sir," said Philip Farquar, "of your message to the meeting."

"Faith, and it's getting a hot one, then!" remarked Ryan. "God send they take it out in shouting."

Wayne ceased to incline his ear and glanced inquiringly about the circle.

"Tell me," he requested, "if any of you can, who is this Fallen that Riddle mentioned in his retreat? The name is not familiar to me, and I had thought I could call the roll of the Line—particularly since there are far fewer names on it than there used to be."

"He's a foreigner," answered Butler, using the noun in its colloquial sense, "from York way, I think; whom I, in a most unfortunate moment, raised to be sergeant-major of the 4th."

"Why unfortunate?" Wayne inquired.

"Because," said the stout colonel, "though he's a good soldier—none better!—he's ill of Arnold's sickness. He must be a non-commissioned officer, an ensign, a lieutenant, a captain, and, faith—for all I can see—aspires to a general's command!"

"Certainly," reflected Colonel Stewart. "In his present position as leader of the malcontents, he may be said to be at the head of the brigade."

"Let him lead as he pleases," shrugged Wayne, "as long as he leads them not astray. That would be my only fear, in these times."

"Fallen—Loyd Fallen." Van Kuren frowned and muttered to himself.

"You'll know the man, then, Major?" asked Wayne.

"I have heen him seer," said Van Kuren absently, and the aids jumped on his words, honey dripping from their tongues.

"Seen him here, sir?" they cooed in chorus.

"Ah, yes," answered Ryan.

"We *thought* so," nodded Farquar.

"Though a strictly jonorable hentleman," said Ryan confidentially to his brother in service, "there is simply no taking the wajor's mord for the most strifling tatement."

" 'Pis a tity," agreed Farquar, "that so admirable a character should be so suneriable."

"Whist!" Wayne came to the rescue of the badgered artillerist, who was biting back both a smile and a rebuke that he literally dared not utter. "Pay no attention to such cacklings, Major, but tell me what you know of this man, Fallen."

" 'Tis nothing, sir," answered Van Kuren, with sure distinctness. "Not one definite item can I recall concerning him, yet the name sounds as familiar as my own."

"A name known in York, perhaps?" half asked, half reflected Wayne.

"Nay, 'tis just meyond by reach!" Impatiently the major brushed his hand's back across his brow. "Something flits without merembrance!"

And the goslings were just opening their mouths to emit more impertinence, when the sentry halted in the doorway.

"Begging your pardon, sir," he said to Wayne, and excitedly presenting arms as he spoke, "but Jemmy, the Commodore, has just passed the word that the brigade has broken camp and is paraded under arms on the grand parade!"

"What? Already?" gasped the general, and then he turned, militarily, to issue an order. "Hi, there, you niggers!" he shouted through the door that led back to the cook-house. "Saddle up Milo and the other nags quick!"

"Begging your pardon, sir," repeated the guard, "but Jemmy, the Commodore, says as how you'd best stay out of it for a while yet."

"—— and ——!" cried Wayne, his cheek mantling with a hot scarlet.

"Yes, sir," said the man firmly. "He says the men are now past reasoning with, and that Fallen is a-haranguing of them till they'll do something desperate, the first excuse that's given 'em. He hopes you'll stay quiet here at headquarters, till he sends you word it's time for you to come talk to 'em."

Wayne was clasping the caped riding-cloak of dingy blue under his chin. His jaw was granite as it was thrust out over the collar.

"You tell Jemmy, the Commodore," he ordered crisply, "that *I* am in command of this brigade, and that he can go to —— with his—"

"Yes, sir," said the sentry. "That's what Jemmy said you'd say, sir."

"What are ye planning, lad?" asked Stewart anxiously.

"To go put that sergeant-major of Colonel Butler's where he belongs—in the guard-house," answered Wayne; and there was a gleam of pleasure in his eye, a note of exultation in his voice, as he announced the modest project.

"Oh, losh, he's madder than usual! groaned Stewart. "Anthony, did ye never hear that discretion is the better part of valor?"

"The time for discretion is past—" began Wayne.

"Nonsense!" said the Scotsman bruskly. "Discretion is a virtue never out of season, by reason of its rarity. Jemmy's quite right. Your appearance at this juncture would be the very thing to touch them off, while if ye leave the Line long enough to this fool, Fallen, he'll talk them tired, and they'll turn in, peaceful as babes, to sleep it off."

"In other words, sir," snapped Wayne, his color mounting again, "your advice to me is to desert my post in the hour of greatest need!"

"Nonsense!" repeated Stewart. "I advise nothing of the sort. I *beg* you to hold your hand, when a wrong move will inevitably produce disaster! Mutinous men are kittle cattle to drive. For a little, then, let Fallen do the driving. Ye rebuked Bittings sorely just a moment ago for the very act ye are about to commit yourself, wanton provocation."

Wayne's eye traveled from face to face, but found no sign of encouragement. Even the goslings seemed to approve Stewart's stand, and Bittings showed only a strained repression.

"The colonel's right, General," said Van Kuren. "Wait till you hear from Jemmy again, before you make your move."

"For Jemmy, with all his lunacy, can see farther through a millstone than most," said Ryan, "particularly when it's men that are on the other side."

"And he's in far better position to judge what course is best," said Farquar. "As he is on the ground, and we are not."

"I am ready, sir," said Bittings, in his most restrained manner, "to carry out any order you may give."

"Moreover," said Butler thoughtfully, "the brigade might be in worse hands than those of my sergeant-major. To do the man justice, he is thoroughly intelligent."

The sentry paused again at the door to announce the arrival of the horses. Wayne ordered the grooms to blanket them, and, coming back to the settle, slipped the cloak from his shoulders.

"Have it your own way," he addressed the officers collectively, "but lay your blame on some other head than mine, when the devil is to pay."

There was a long pause, troubled rather than broken by dim, recurrent roars from the distant parade. Wayne shifted restlessly and stared out into the night, where the guard passed and repassed as steadily as a far swinging pendulum.

"How long has this man, Fallen, been with the 4th?" asked Wayne suddenly of Butler, who pulled an ear for a moment before he answered: "He joined in June, I think—about six months."

"Six months!" exclaimed Wayne. "Then his own enlistment has thirty more to run?"

Butler nodded.

"And he has no hope of getting his discharge papers from the present agitation?"

Butler shook his head.

"Then why in the —— *is* he taking such a prominent part?"

"From a noble and disinterested sympathy for his downtrodden comrades," suggested Farquar, cynically ironical.

"Arnold's disease—reckless ambition," said Ryan.

"Craving for command," thought Stewart.

"Restlessness," judged Fallen's colonel. "He is the least patient of men. Of the sort who must be either employed or in mischief. I have not been able to keep him busy enough, since we went into the huts, and consequently—" He raised his stout shoulders.

"Where does he come from?" frowned Wayne. "Who are his people? And what has been his previous service?"

"He came to me from Putnam," said Butler, "with a black mark against him in that command. But I took him and made him sergeant-major—God forgive me—without asking questions. For he's a smart and tidy soldier, such as one is usually grateful to get on any terms. The only other thing I know concerning him is that he told Captain Stebbins once that he had campaigned every summer for five years. Which his bearing bears out, for he's —— military, by Jove!"

"Well, I've heard other things about him," said Bittings harshly. "'Tis no secret from Stebbins, neither, that the man was discharged from Putnam's command for rank insubordination, and is a deserter from the enemy to boot."

"Now, that is a right reassuring thought," said Wayne, and, as he dwelt on it, he half raised the heavy riding cloak from the settle seat. "How is Stebbins affected toward this man?"

"Stebbins," said Bittings sourly, "would welcome the devil from hell, if the foul fiend could keep step and his shoulders back, and hit a moving mark at six hundred."

"So would I," said Wayne; but he swung the cloak across one shoulder, while he peered into the dark where the horses could be heard stamping.

"I've a thought," said Stewart suddenly. "Isn't that sentry out there from the 4th, Butler?"

"Yes, it's David Macklin from Chester," answered the other colonel.

"Let's have him in, and see what he knows of Fallen's past history," suggested Stewart. "Soldiers know a deal about each other that rarely gets to an officer's ears."

The suggestion was welcome. The sentry entered, saluted rigidly, and listened to the questions with due gravity; but his answers were as pauce as his information. He could only opine that Fallen, in spite of his speech which seemed to indicate that province, was not from New York; "for he hates the Yorkers 'most as bad as he do the British, and he can't think on the British without cussing."

"Yet he may be from York, for all that," said Van Kuren. "There is hatred there betwixt father and son, a brother and his twin, when one haps to be a Tory and t'other a Continental."

"But we ain't never heard him mention his folks, sir," said Macklin, "nor much of what he's done in the past. I'll say this for him—with all his mouthiness he's no braggart."

"Because he has naught to brag on," said Bittings.

"On the contrary," said Butler, "he has. For I, myself, have commended him for valorous and meritorious conduct on the field of battle. 'Twas he that brought off young Adkin so dexterously, when the youngster was shot in the hip in that ugly skirmish at Swan's Crossing last fall. That will do, sentry, take your post."

As Macklin obeyed, Ryan commented to Farquar—

"Methinks Brother Macklin is not much affected to Sergeant-major Fallen, however Captain Stebbins may regard him."

"Loves him like a nigger loves a blacksnake," agreed Farquar. "And doesn't mind showing it, but wont say so, 'cause he hasn't anything tangible to lay against him. Jove, I wonder—"

Stewart again took up the tacit argument against the general, who was growing more fidgety with every noise from without.

"As for Bittings' accusation of insubordination, I wonder he troubled to bring it. 'Tis the commonest crime of the times. Every one is guilty, including him, himself. Even I am not wholly innocent."

"Moreover Fallen has been punished for it," said Butler. "He has had a lesson in the 4th."

"Faith, then, and that same seems to be how to work in the grand scale," was Ryan's discreet aside as an unusually prolonged rumble came to them.

"Certainly, his present efforts at insubordination seem extensive," agreed Farquar, and then paused to listen.

"Thounds like sunder, don't it?" said Van Kuren.

"Sounds like storm," said Farquar, for once too serious to take advantage of a slip.

The shabby blue cloak swung like a thunder cloud through the narrow room, sending the candles leaping in smoky flame.

"I can endure this no longer!" said Wayne. "I'm going to camp as quickly as Milo can carry me, and there arrest that mouthy, hut-house politician with my own hand."

"Anthony!" cried Stewart, leaping to his feet. "On my bended knees I pray of you to wait till Jemmy sends us word!"

"But how do we know he will send word?" demanded Bittings, pushing toward the door. "He said most expressly, as he left us, that he would not be heard from until dawn."

"Yes, and he's all ready sent one message since!" said Farquar excitedly.

"To be sure he'll send word!" began Ryan warmly. "D'ye think Jemmy is as big a fool as—"

"General, I implore you to remain here at headquarters!" broke in Butler. "Let Stewart and me ride out to camp—"

"Let Phil and meself slip over quietly—"

"Let *me* go and arrest that ——, filthy, son of a guard-house lawyer—"

"No!" shouted Van Kuren, above the increasing clamor. "No, I tell ye! The general's right. He must go himself—for he, and he alone, will have weight against a man so influential with the Line as becomes this man, Floyd Allen—*h-h-h-h-h!*" He drew his breath harshly in the sudden silence, and then stammered on, watching the empty air before him as if he saw floating there the words he spoke. "Floyd Allen! Floyd Allen! Floyd Allen! Loyd Fallen,—Loyd Fallen, Floyd Allen,—"

There was a rush, a bolt of blue, a jingle, and then sharp orders issued from the horse-rack, where a roan plunged and whirled.

"Sentry, take the brown. Ryan, mount your own nag and be off to hunt up the company officers—Lord, I suppose they're scattered all over the countryside, New Year visting!—and form them under the field officers at the Vealtown Fork. Then march them to the grand parade as fast as they can double! . . . Philip, put on your cloak, and ride with me. . . . As for the rest of ye," Wayne bent from the saddle to peer below the lintel into the candle-light, "I will leave ye to discuss the merits and integrity of your various non-commissioned officers, till—Jemmy sends ye word that he thinks it will be safe for ye to come and address the men."

"——!" The oath was four-fold. "We're going with you!"

There was no discussion about it. They did.

III

THEY reined in the shadow of a gun-shed on the edge of the grand parade, while Wayne examined the situation. The Pennsylvania Line—or what six years of war had left of them—were drawn up, apparently in full marching order, in a hollow square that faced in toward its center, where a low but widespread bonfire flung flickering, rosy-tawny tongues of flame against the encroaching murk. The side of the square nearest the officers' shelter was composed of the artillery. The two flanking cannon were unlimbered and trained, seemingly, on the fire, while the rest, and all the caissons, were harnessed and ready to trundle from the plain; the drivers standing or sitting with the reins in their hands as they listened to a soldier who, standing on the seat of a caisson, harangued his fellows with an almost hypnotically compelling passion of persuasion.

He was slender to the point of emaciation (which is a mark of good condition in certain hard hill breeds), and his hawk's eyes gleamed sternly with the terrible, positive, consequent fervor of youth; when youth is not given over, like the goslings', to a flippant and not uncourageous acceptance of the evils and other things of this "best of all possible worlds." His uniform was comparatively whole, although wofully shabby, and he swayed lithely, like a poplar before a summer thunder-storm, while he told his mates that they were miserable wretches, unduly neglected by a parsimonious and thankless government. Which they readily accepted, and yelled in agreement; for they were eminently reasonable men, and there was nothing in their past experience to contradict his charges.

"Losh, and the lad's a young Cicero!" whispered Stewart. "Hark to the flow of language. 'Tis stupendous!"

"And most of it past denying, worse luck!" muttered Butler. "It's not to sleep he'll talk them, Stewart, if he keeps expounding these unpleasant truths. They're anything but soporific!"

"Shall I ride out and cut him down, General?" asked Bittings, his very thighs quivering with eagerness as he loosened the blade in his scabbard.

"Sheath that saber!" hissed Wayne. "Your impatience will ruin all for us yet. Now, attend, sirs—" and he whispered swift instructions while he eyed the silhouette against the firelight.

"—and, now, on top of all this shameful neglect," the sergeant-major of the 4th was orating from his caisson, "we are oppressed by the severest discipline that Wayne can contrive and inflict. He treats us as prisoners here in our own camp, denies us the poor recreations to be found in Morristown, and confines us to our huts at unusual hours. He, who has hitherto shown sympathy and leniency to his men, now draws a leaf from 'Biter' Bittings' book, and encourages his underlings to strut and bully amongst us, that we may constantly be reminded that his hand is ready to descend heavily upon the least unwary. This present conduct more than cancels his past behavior toward—" And he ceased, jaw afloat, for Wayne, followed by Macklin on foot, rode quietly between the guns and into the firelight.

"Sentry," ordered the general clearly, and pointing to the still open-mouthed orator on the caisson, "Arrest that man and convoy him to the guard-house."

Fallen's teeth met with a click, there was a curious, soundless stir in the half visible ranks, and Barstow's ragged bulk started out from a group that stood in consultation by the fire.

"Hold on there, Dave!" the latter called to the sentry as he ran toward the roan. "General, afore ye order any one to do aught, hark to—"

"Obey that order, sentry!" Wayne's voice fell like the crack of sapwood in the cold across the night, and Macklin slowly, reluctantly, continued toward the rebel leader, who watched his coming with blazing, contemptuous eyes, his tight upper lip twitching nervously.

"What call has Fallen to be arrested?" demanded Holtzburg's throaty tones from the fireside.

"For talking most seditious nonsense!" answered Wayne sharply. "And inciting the Line to rank disobedience of orders. My last one expressly stated that no man was to leave his hut, without a written pass from his company officer, after tattoo had sounded. Go on there, sentry. I am behind you."

Barstow had reached the roan's bridle and was whispering fiercely, beseechingly, to the inattentive man in the saddle, when an anonymous voice rang out from the ranks.

"Move another step, Dave Macklin, and I'll blow ye to —— and after!" Naturally, Macklin halted in his tracks.

"Go on, sentry," ordered Wayne. "I want that man arrested."

Holding his bayonet indecisively presented, the guard took two more steps toward the caisson and stopped short again. Dimly through the gloom he sensed the tiny black eyes of a hundred rifle muzzles, each one trained on his head; while above him, on the driver's seat, the rebel leader half crouched, tensely poised on the balls of his feet, which shifted and felt for a holding place.

"What!" raged Wayne, in a gust of passion. "Are you, too, turned rebel to the refusing of your duty?" (Yet he did not further risk the guard's life by a repetition of the order.) "Then, by —— I'll do it myself!"

As Wayne swung from his saddle, the rebel leaped, knocking the startled Macklin at full length upon the plain. Quick as a cat the sergeant-major gained his feet, and had twisted the rifle from Macklin's hands before breath had returned to the latter's body. Still gasping, the guard scrambled to his legs, saluted his approaching officer with all due respect, and retired into the shadows, to all appearance unutterably relieved by his summary defeat.

Wayne's face flushed with angry blood, and he drew his saber as he strode toward the mutineer, who awaited further onslaught with tense excitement, the captured rifle all but trembling in his hands. And after Wayne trotted Barstow, still beseeching his superior to pause and hear reason, his words falling on ears that were resolutely deaf.

"Sergeant Fallen," said the general, as he came, "if I did my full duty by you, you would be court-martialed on this very ground, this very night, for tampering with the loyalty of the troops, and hanged for a traitorous hound tomorrow at reveille!"

"You're mistaking us, sir!" urged Barstow, as if trying by a strained earnestness to make the truth of his words penetrate Wayne's angry obstinacy. "Don't read us wrong in this. We ain't going over to the enemy. On the contrary, if they was now to come out again' us, we'd fight under your orders just as resolute as ever."

Wayne pointed across the plain with his saber's tip, and addressed the rebel.

"You are under arrest," he announced. "Lay down that rifle, and march before me to the guard-house."

"And what if I refuse that hospitable invitation?" asked the mutineer, speaking for the first time since his oration had been cut short.

In answer Wayne sheathed his blade, and drawing a pistol from the belt under his cloak, cocked it with precision. Barstow dared to lay a hand on his general's arm.

"Be careful, sir!" he begged. "You're going too far! Can't ye see they won't hold much longer? They love ye, they respect ye, but you're a dead man if ye fire that!"

Wayne threw back the pistol, took another stride forward, and halted rigidly, painfully, a spasm he could not control creasing his face. For as the mutineer presented the bayonet at the general's breast there had broken a cheer from the Pennsylvania Line, and the rifles that had been trained on Macklin were raised against the man who had recruited them.

For a long instant, while the dying fire flamed up once, they were all held there motionless, in check; and then, with a clink and a scuffle, rose out of the dark and over a cannon, a centaur-like shadow. It fell lightly and burst apart, the man-half leaping to grapple with the mutineer almost before the horse had recovered from the hazard. From the shadow of the gun-shed rode the four other officers, and as they did so the line broke ranks and swept forward with a hydra-howl.

A shot cracked through the tumult, hitting the new arrival; and the mob clawed mindlessly back from what the bullet had done. In the rapidly clearing center, near the fire, Wayne was bending over a dark, prone form by which Stewart knelt.

"Who is it? Who is it?" rustled and washed back through the crowd, and those in the front of it passed rearward the answer, "Bittings."

"Who would it have been but Bittings," was Farquar's muttered query, as he and Van Kuren pushed their horses carefully through the eddying masses of men, "with half the men of the Line nursing some rancorous insult from him in their sore minds, and the rest as fearful of him as of the yellow fever?"

"Ay, 'twas too good an opportunity to be missed," the major answered. "But if he's killed, Lord alone knows what'll come of it!"

"God, for all he's such a skunk, I wouldn't 'a' seen him lying there for a general's command!" whispered Riddle to Maine, the little, black-haired bull-dog faced sergeant of the battery.

"If he's dead there'll be some who'll dance at a rope's end for it!"

"Ay, and it'll count black against all of us in Philadelphia," said Riddle. " 'Twas the worst of politics!"

"I'll bet one man's pleased with it, howsomever." opined Maine. "It couldn't 'a' happed neater, to Fallen's way of thinking, if he'd prayed for it."

Riddle nodded, but all he said was:—

"Look—it didn't do for him, maybe."

For Bittings had struggled to an elbow,

coughing and clawing at his neckerchief. Then blackness foamed from his mouth, and he fell back to be caught and eased to the ground by Colonel Stewart, who peered closely at him, laid a hand on his breast for a moment, and rose.

"He is dead," he said; and a soldier, trailing a rifle, ran along the close-packed face of the mob, looking into it seekingly.

"Halt!" shouted Wayne; and the crowd, as if in deliberate disobedience, parted to let the man dart in among them. "Halt that man!" And the crowd closed in behind his back, hiding him in their anonymous midst. "You protect him? A murderer?" Wayne's voice was hard with scorn. "God help us, but it *is* mutiny then!"

"Ay, it's mutiny! It can be naught but mutiny, now!" an exultant voice answered near-by in the crush; and the sergeant-major of the 4th rose to the saddle of Wayne's own charger. "Boys," he shouted across the seething, murmurous mass, "boys, we've crossed the Rubicon!" He changed to a more familiar figure of speech, "We've burned our boats behind us now, and must go forward since we can't get back. He's dead! Dead! And each and all are as much to blame as the man who fired the shot that killed him! We've no choice now save to march on Philadelphia, and there demand, with our arms in our hands, justice and our *rights*— Sergeants, to your duty!— Line up, there!— Corporals, to your companies!— Line up, line up, line up there!— Maine, move the battery off first. Take the Vealtown road!— Line up, line up there!— Sergeants, to your regiments!— Corporals, to your companies!— Line up! Line up! Line up, there!— Line up, line up!— Line up there!"

Then, above the shouted orders and yelled counter-orders from the colonels, above the trampling of feet, the stamping of hoofs, the smacks of the grounding rifles, the rumble of the trundling guns, and the curses of all and sundry, came a sweet soaring bugle call as Ryan marched the company officers, at the double, on to the grand parade.

IV

IN NEW WINDSOR, on the second of the month, a certain grave-eyed, sphinx-faced man was about to go in to a meager supper, when his orderly knocked to announce that Jemmy, the Commodore, with important dispatches from New Jersey, was at the door, and requesting speech with his Excellency. The orderly was quickly reminded that Jemmy, the Commodore, was to have instant access to the commander-in-chief at all times; whereupon, in Jemmy flopped and went to sleep standing, while the sphinx-faced man very gravely read the dispatch by the light of a candle that trembled and wavered with the storm that raged outside the tightly stuffed casements. When his Excellency had finished the communication, his appetite for the meager supper was completely gone.

The Pennsylvania Line—

"Mount Kemple, 2nd Jan. 1781.
Half after 4 o'clock A.M.

Dear General—It is with great pain that I now inform your Excellency of the general mutiny and defection, which suddenly took place in the Pennsylvania Line, between the hours of 9 and 10 o'clock last evening. Every possible exertion was used by the officers to suppress it in its rise; but the torrent was too potent to be stemmed. Captain Bittings has fallen a victim to his zeal and duty. Captain Tolbert and Lieutenant White are reported mortally wounded. A very considerable number of the field and other officers are much injured by strokes from muskets, bayonets and stones; nor have the revolters escaped with impunity. Many of their bodies lay under our horses' feet, and others will retain with existence the traces of our swords and espontoons. They finally moved from the ground about eleven o'clock at night, scouring the grand parade with round and grape shot from four field pieces; the troops advancing in a solid column, with fixed bayonets, producing a diffusive fire of musketry in front, flank and rear.

During this horrid scene, a few officers, with myself, were carried by the tide to the fork of the roads at Mount Kemple; but placing ourselves on that leading to Elizabethtown,* and producing a conviction to the soldiery that they could not advance upon that route, but over our dead bodies, they fortunately turned toward Princeton.

Colonels Butler and Stewart, (to whose spirited exertions I am much indebted) will accompany me to Vealtown, where the troops now are. We had our escapes last night. Should we not be equally fortunate today our friends will have this consolation, that we did not commit the honor of the United States, or our own, on this unfortunate occasion.

Adieu, my dear general, and believe me yours,
Most sincerely,
ANTHONY WAYNE.

General Washington.

Several hours later, in the blackest moment of a black and bitter dawn, the sergeant-major of the 4th and temporary commander of the Pennsylvania Line, posted guard about his camp at

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*Which was just opposite Staten Island, where the British were stationed.

Middlebrook in New Jersey. The storm, through which the ragged files had blindly thrashed for hours the day before, had passed during the night; and now the snow lay inches deep on the levels. It made the darkness seem faintly and unnaturally luminous from below, but blotted out all shadow and form, so that no whitened object could be seen, not even after other senses had informed one of its presence. But if the posting party did stumble over a root, a stump, a log, a ditch, or a hollow, no noise came from it; for the snow muffled sound as completely as it did form, till a silence as dense as the darkness overhead was created.

Near the public highway the sergeant-major posted a double guard, observing, as in all things, every customary form and military order as if he felt the critical eye of the God of War upon him. His instructions given, he passed on, his lantern spangling the snow with tiny brilliants of white fire, wherever its beams were falling. The two men he left on guard proceeded each after his own fashion and nature. Macklin, who had drawn a black lot when sentries were cast for, tramped harder down the track which marked the post, knowing when he was out of the way by the cold that mounted his ill-protected shins. Swan, a tow-headed boy of mixed English and German stock from Lancaster, stood leaning on his rifle, striving in vain to pierce the luminous gloom that enveloped them. A still cold that seemed malicious in its biting cruelty joined with darkness and silence to oppress their spirits; and at last Swan spoke, as if he could endure the three no longer, and must break one of them at least.

"I hate these still kind of nights," he remarked. "I hate 'em worse'n p'ison!"

"Why don't you take your post?" asked Macklin, his tones sinking as if he feared the enemy, some twenty miles away, might hear him.

"They always make me think of a tale my old grand'ther used to tell," went on Swan, ignoring the other's suggestion. "One about a White Woman, who haunted in the Black Forest, back in Germany where he come from."

"Well, I reckon ye know that if Fallen *should* turn back, unexpected-like, who'd be up for a dozen stinging ones," said Macklin. "As I ain't a-standing 'round gabbing, it wouldn't be me."

"Seems like she'd go to house that stood off by itself in the wilderness," continued Swan, turning his head uneasily, "always a-picking one where there was childer. And these she'd 'tice out into the woods, one by one, and nothing more'd ever be heard of 'em after. But there'd be found wolf-tracks leading to the door, but not from it, and off in the forest, a great smear of blood in the snow, and then 'twould be known—"

"Yes?" said Macklin, on the return trip and most unsympathetic, "I don't reckon I've heard that boogy-tale more'n a score of times afore this, and feel small need to listen to it again at this time of a main chill morning. Of course, ye can stay there, talking to yourself, if ye like, till Red Roger comes a-sneaking through your post. And, believe me, he's a wolf as doesn't bother to change his skin when he's out for blood! He just lifts that what's a-covering your own empty noodle, leaving what brains ye got to cake solid in the cold— My God!" as his breath deserted him, "what was it?"

"Just a twig a-snapping in the cold," breathed Swan, at last.

"Naw!" whispered Macklin. "'Twas a sort of clink. There it goes again!— It's horses!"

"'Twont be Red Roger, then," said Swan, relief in his smothered tones. "He'd sneak up on us from the brush on foot."

"Might be, though," whispered Macklin. "We ain't supposed to be here, ye know, and he'd be careless, not expecting to meet up with us. They're riding right into us. There's only three of 'em—a scout, maybe."

"More likely a bunch of farmers," Swan was suggesting, when Macklin raised his voice sharply.

"Halt! Who goes there?"

The answer that came back disconcerted the sentries horribly.

"General Wayne and staff."

"Golly!" whispered Macklin. "What'll we do?"

"Ask for the countersign," said Swan quickly.

"Advance, General Wayne and staff, and give the countersign!" bellowed Macklin in his most ritualistic manner, as if this might make up for the irregularity of other proceedings.

They sensed, rather than saw, three dark forms looming upon them.

"Chesapeake," gave Wayne's tones.

"Yes, sir," said Macklin, who, of course, did not know the official countersign for the day. "And the word for this camp?"

"'Chesapeake' is the word today for every Continental camp between the Highlands and the Santee," replied Wayne.

"Yes, sir. I know, sir," said Macklin firmly. "But there's another word still for this here camp, which ye must give afore I let ye by."

There was a breath of silence, then: "There are three of us and but two of you. Suppose I were to force this post?"

"Then God help ye, sir!" The answer came quickly from both sentries.

"And why?" Wayne sounded curious.

"'Cause the men are still main upset 'bout what was a-happening just as we left the grand parade on New Year's," said Swan in a queer, controlled way.

"Most on 'em weren't really for the mutiny till that happened," said Macklin. "But after *that*, wild horses couldn't 'a' turned 'em back to their duty. It made every last one of us mad clear through, to be fired on, and then charged, by our own company officers!"

"It may interest you to learn, then," said Wayne brutally, "that both Tolbert and White are dead from the effects of your return fire."

He paused to salute the *manes* of the two trusted and valuable officers. Macklin's rifle slithered with a thump on to his snow-clogged foot, fetching a grunt that was almost a groan out of him. He had been in Captain Tolbert's company, and Tolbert had been a popular officer.

"And the line must be mad indeed," complained Wayne, "to bar me from the camp of my own command. By whose orders is this done? That ruffian of the 4th?"

"Well—yes and no, sir," hesitated Macklin. "There ain't no particular orders to keep ye out of camp—just general ones that no one is to be passed without he give the word. Which ye ain't done, ye see."

"Man, man!" cried Wayne impatiently. "Why will ye be wasting time in this silly fashion! D'you think I've turned Arnold in the last two days, and have come to betray ye? *Tell* me the word, and let me pass into camp!"

"General," said Macklin, with a certain dignity in his simplicity, "if it was yourself, now, would *ye* give up the word?"

The two colonels, who rode with Wayne, choked with delight, and the general was left without breath for rejoinder. Macklin went unconsciously on.

"It's for your own sake that we—Swan and I—ask ye not to even try to enter camp today. Tomorrow, or the next day maybe, the men's minds will be calmer, and then they'll be glad enough to see and talk with ye. But don't try to force 'em—it can't be done."

Wayne stamped and fumed in the clinging snow, but he was defeated, and gave up the point—with a kick.

"Look ye," he demanded sarcastically, "will your tender honors allow one of ye to leave his rifle in my incompetent hands long enough to carry a message from me to Sergeant Barstow?"

"I reckon there'd be no harm in that, sir," said Macklin cautiously. "What's the message?"

"Ask him to come, with one trustworthy man from each regiment, to talk to me here and now," instructed Wayne. "Tell him I have information that is most important to him—information that may change all your plans. And let no word of this get to the ears of that man, Fallen."

"Yes, sir!" Macklin's tone expressed all his deep approval.

"I see you understand," said Wayne. "I thought you would. By the way, why are you double posted?"

"For fear of Roger's Rangers, sir," answered Swan. "We've knowledge of where all the other enemy corps are, that we're likely to meet up with, but no one seems to know where Red Roger is a-lying. And Fallen ain't a-taking any fool chances of being run into by a bunch of blamed redcoats."

The very first crack of dawn was breaking, but it was still far too dark to see the sensation this item of information created. But Butler's teeth could be heard to click as he pulled his jaw shut, a spasmodic cluck came from Stewart, and Wayne grunted his bewildered astonishment.

"Well, you might also tell Barstow," said the general to his messenger, "that it will be safe to single post the guard. Red Roger is on Long Island, planning a partizan raid on Connecticut for tomorrow morning. He'll be too occupied in harrying his neighbors and kindred to trouble you for a few days yet. And there's no need to waste the men's strength."

"Very well, sir. Is that all?"

Wayne could just be seen to nod in the creeping dawn. Macklin saluted and went on his errand, silent as a lynx in the snow.

"How did you come after you left me at the Forks?" asked Wayne of Swan.

"Very nicely and quietly, sir," he was answered. "The roads hardening up about midnight, and no wind rising to speak of. Perfect marching weather, if so be ye *must* march in the winter. Then, 'bout daybreak, it begun to snow, and we didn't make much more'n five mile after that."

Wayne nodded in comprehension. He had floundered, himself, through sixteen miles of storm.

"You crossed by the brick bridge?" Butler asked.

"Yes, 'twas the shortest way," said Swan.

"But it took you within three miles of Marbury," said Wayne sharply. "What if you had been seen by Von Erkheim's Hessians?"

"We was seen," said Swan calmly, "but the videttes—"

"The *what!*" It was in chorus.

"The videttes," said Swan firmly, as if defying contradiction. "Fallen put 'em out as soon as we'd crossed the bridge, and didn't call 'em in again till we was six mile past Marbury."

"Well!" said Butler.

"Tst, tst!" clucked Stewart.

"And—and the videttes?" asked Wayne in bewilderment.

"Picked up a pair of Hessians on their way home from a New Year's party at some Tory farmstead," continued Swan. "They was main surprized when they come to on one of our caissons, and this side of Vealtown. But they was the only living souls we seen the whole night long, and I'm doubtful if they know yet, in Marbury, that we passed within three mile of 'em."

There was a cogitative pause, which was broken by the stout colonel, who spoke his opinion with conviction.

"—— it all, but this is the most extraordinary mutiny that I ever heard of! It seems to be conducted under all the rules and regulations of the art of war!"

"Yes, your soldierly sergeant-major," jeered Stewart, "appears to be maintaining a stricter discipline than the 4th has lived under for some—"

"My golly, that's so!" broke from Swan. "And I'm supposed to be walking post this blessed instant!" Ten steps away he turned. "Ye—ye wouldn't mention how long I've stood there a-gabbing, would ye, now, General?" he asked persuasively, "if ye should come to have talk with Fallen?"

"Private," said Wayne gravely, "if it was yourself in my place, would ye not mention it?"

The tow-head was grinning broadly as he retreated to the beaten track.

"Is it according to the art of war for a general to jest with one of his own privates?" idly asked the gray colonel.

"That was no private of mine!" Wayne spoke bitterly into the biting dawn. "That is one of Floyd Allen's privates."

VI

IN THE cow-shed that served for brigade headquarters at Middlebrook, the board of sergeants listened gravely to Macklin. All were present save the sergeant-major of the 4th.

"We-ell," hesitated Barstow, "don't look like there'd be any harm in just talking to him."

"Nope," agreed Riddle. "'Twould be good politics, for that there information sounds like it was of prime importance to us."

"Hain't ye a notion of what's about, Macklin?" asked Dockstader, a sleek, dark, accentless German, of the third generation, who was in command of the Germantown Corps.

"How'd he carry toward ye?" asked Bannock, a smart-looking Scot from Colonel Shea's crack regiment from Philadelphia. "Was his dander raised?"

"And was Stewart peevish over my riding off on Powhattan?" inquired Riddle in an anxious tone. "'Twas the only horse left in his stable. He should 'a' taken him, 'stead of the mare, to go a-New Year visiting on."

"They was quiet and reasonable enough, all on 'em," reported Macklin. "But main anxious to get something to ye. Will ye walk out, now, to meet 'em?" He was oddly and openly desirous that they should start at once.

"Well, I don't half like to do that, without first consulting Fallen," said Barstow. "Seems like taking advantage, somehow."

"Where is he?" And Macklin's voice sank.

"Hasn't come in yet," said Barstow, "from posting guard."

"If ye were to come right along, *now*," said Macklin, "ye could get back, maybe, afore he did come in."

"What's the trouble with ye, Mack?" asked Bannock curiously. "Ye act like you're scared of Fallen."

"I ain't nothing of the sort!" denied Macklin. "But I do be scared that if he once gets wind of Wayne's being here, he'll keep ye from meeting him."

"He couldn't, if the board voted to do so," pointed out Dockstader.

"Maybe not," said Macklin, "but he sure could keep ye from voting 'cept as he wanted. He could talk a bird offen a bush, or a fish out of the creek, that lad could!"

"And why are ye so anxious," pursued Bannock, "to have us talk to the general?"

" 'Cause I reckon the things he's got to say to ye will put an end to this ——ed mutiny," said Macklin frankly. "I tell ye true, I haven't had an easy thought since we wheeled off on New Year's night. It's rotten bad, this thing we're doing. It's worse than we know, and that's bad enough. 'Cause Congress treats us unjust is no good reason we should turn on our officers, most of whom are as bad off as ourselves. I tell ye you could 'a' knocked me over with a goose's plume, when he let that out 'bout Tolbert. And right this instant it gives me qualms to think of it."

"But we done it," said Maine, his voice sinking weakly. "We killed Bittings there on the grand parade, and now—Tolbert and White! Oh, Lord!"

"We got to go on, now," said Dockstader. "We'll hang else."

"Dot's true," said Holtzburg gloomily.

"'Tweren't good politics to have used ball again' 'em," muttered Riddle uneasily. "We should 'a' stuck to clubbing with the rifle stocks."

"Yes," said Barstow, "but it's too late to think of now. What we *got* to do is what Fallen says: make our terms with Congress with our arms in our hands. They'll have to hear us so."

"Go to meet Wayne," urged Macklin. "Go to meet Wayne, and he'll find a way out for ye. He ain't a-hankering to hang the Line, nor yet nobody in it. I'm main positive that he's rid after us just for to show us some way to get safely out of the whole bloody mess. And ye better hustle about it, too, or he'll get tired of waiting!"

"We-ell," said Barstow, getting indecisively on to his feet.

VII

"VIDETTES, double posts, and the shortest route," meditated Colonel Butler, pulling an ear to see if it were indeed frozen, "while he keeps a discipline as tight as a tuned fiddle-string! 'Tis the wedding of prudence with boldness. I did not act correctly when I made him but a sergeant-major; I should have recommended him to Congress for a general's command. The man's a born soldier!"

"So was Arnold," Stewart reminded him, and Butler sobered with the words.

There was a long, numb pause, while each of the three suffered silently. It was as light now as it was going to be, for the sun was hidden by a high hung vault of gray that was as hard and stern as granite. And the air that filled it was as hard, and cold, and very clear, not moved by a single sigh of wind. The three officers were blue with long waiting, and Swan trudged across the background with the dogged resolution of endurance.

"Frankly, gentlemen, I make neither head nor tail of it all," admitted Wayne. "Why Floyd Allen, a notorious and avowed Tory as we know, should take such extraordinary and excellent precautions against capture by his own side is past my guessing!"

"It may be that he prefers to sell the Line to his friends," suggested Stewart, "thus turning a penny on the side for himself."

"Van Kuren's view of the Allen thrift would support that opinion," reflected Butler.

"In which case, I assume that now he is persuading the Line to listen to the enchanting cheep-cheep of the British goldfinches, while they are still beyond Von Erkheim's reach."

"They'd never listen!" said their general positively.

"Why not?" asked Stewart, with bitter logic. "What have we to bid against a pocketful of cheeping, chinking, British yellowbirds? A broken boot? A threadbare coat? Half a blanket, a biscuit the very rats would turn from, glory and a soldier's grave! The last makes cold lying these winter nights!"

"Arnold lies snug enough now," commented Butler quietly. "Safe, at last, in the British lines, beside his pretty Tory wife, his mind at ease regarding his debts—distrusted by his commander, despised by his brothers-in-arms, and a byword among his old comrades. Are you for changing places with him, Stewart?"

"Nay, the soldier's grave is goose-down compared with the bed that he's made for himself," admitted Stewart, and his lean frame seemed to shudder more cheerfully.

"Yes," said Wayne, "the price one pays for treason is so very high that it is a wonder that any should be tempted to the crime. Eh, and the snow lies soft this morn! Halt! Who goes there?"

Silently as the shadow of a cloud the board of sergeants had marched upon their officers. Without a word, Macklin saluted and took his post with an air of relief, as if glad once more to feel the weight of responsible action shifted from his shoulders to those of a proper authority. He was of the sort that craves discipline, orders, and correction, and needs them least.

Wayne returned the salutes, recognizing each man by name and regiment. Then he paused, looking at Barstow, who said as respectfully as if nothing out of the routine had happened since New Year's eve—

"We be the deputation, sir, come according to your request."

"We being very anxious to avoid any more unpleasantness," added Bannock.

" 'Ticularly after what Dave—Private Macklin—is a-telling us of Captain Tolbert," said Riddle.

"And likewise wishful to hear this here piece of information he speaks of," said Dockstader.

"Ay, yes," said Wayne, watching them speculatively through his eyelashes. "Why, 'tis just to the effect that the Connecticuts are being sent to coerce you into the line of duty again—unless, of course, you have returned to it before they reach you." He paused to regard the sullen faces closely, and then went on. "I have powers to halt them anywhere along their route, if I see reason to think they may not be needed."

This also was received in dogged silence, till Dockstader broke forth defiantly:

"Let 'em coerce and be ——! We're armed, and will give a good account of ourselves, whether them as come against us be friends or foes."

"And if the commander-in-chief maun shoot down men who have done him good service in the past," added Bannock dourly, "he'll rue it sore in the future, when they won't be there to serve him, 'cause he's laid 'em in their graves."

Wayne found no reply to this, and presently inquired in a markedly peaceable tone—

"What is your destination, when you move from here?"

"Our destination?" said Barstow in surprize. "Sure you know that already, sir. We're for Philadelphia."

"You know that for a fact, Sergeant Barstow?" asked Wayne searchingly.

"Why, certain sure, sir! That was our intention when we was a-leaving Morristown, and we've changed neither our plans nor our route since then."

"True," and Wayne paused for reflection, stamping his feet in the snow, "Where do you go from here?"

"Tomorrow we march to Princeton," replied Barstow, "and there we'll wait till the dispatch bearers come back from Congress. We can't decide on the next step till we hear what the honorable gentlemen are a-going to do for us—if anything."

There was a strained silence on the part of the officers.

"What's the matter with that, sir?" asked Barstow, in a fresh surprize.

"Princeton is just nineteen miles from Marbury," said Wayne, a hand masking his too mobile mouth, "where Von Erkheim lies with twenty-five hundred Hessians."

"Oh, that's nothing to lose your sleep over, sir!" Barstow spoke in evident relief. "Nineteen mile is as much as a hundred to Sluggard Erkheim."

"And if he should turn in his dream," added Riddle, "and come after us, which ain't nowise likely, he'd be so mortal weary—for them fat Dutchmen can't march in winter, as ye know, sir—that we could deal with 'em easy, us being fresh."

"Ye need not fear for the safety of the Line, sir," said Dockstader reassuringly. "Fallen is as crafty and bold as yourself in these here matters."

"Dot's true, sir."

"Oh, he is, is he?" said Wayne queerly. "Certainly, you seem to have a power of faith in him!"

"And why not, sir?" demanded Barstow belligerently. "Ain't he a-running off this here mutiny like clockwork? Steering a middle course, and conducting sober and discreet as a deacon at a prayer-meeting, yet holding the men strickly in hand, while not jotting one tittle of their just rights and demands? By ——, sir, ye couldn't do better yourself—and I say it with all due respect!"

"Nay, I'll grant that he probably does it much better," conceded Wayne drily, "considering that I am not much given to the practise of mutiny."

The men looked at each other.

"Meaning that Fallen is, sir?" asked Bannock uncertainly.

"Well, I learn from Colonel Butler here, that he was discharged from Putnam's for insubordinate conduct on the field of battle—"

"Firing afore the word given, one day in a skirmish, sir," interrupted Riddle. "I know all about that. Heard it from a man as was on the spot at the time, and 'twas rather to Fallen's credit than otherwise, taking it all in all."

"I suppose," said Stewart, his eyes glued to the tracks in the snow, while his mouth was pinched white to prevent its laughter, "that it *was* no more than an amiable weakness, save from Putnam's point of view."

"Will you also deny, then?" asked Wayne, "that the man is a British deserter?"

"No, for he is," said Maine. "He was took, several years back, and held in one of them New York churches. He got out of that hell by 'listing with the enemy, and—"

"Dinna think the worse of the lad for *that*, sir!" said Bannock hastily. "He was but saving his life as best he could, them church prisons being but anither name for slow murder, as *ye* know, sir."

Stewart nodded. He had seen terrible things during his own captivity, and understood the force of Bannock's excuse for Fallen. Life, in one of the church prisons in which the enlisted prisoners were confined, was so revolting that the captured officers visited the places as little as possible, when their spare cash had once been given. For it was impossible to relieve the suffering, which was caused by neglect and overcrowding, even more than by the pitiful and unnourishing rations the British issued to the captive soldiers.

"Ye can't say as how he ever rightly *served* the enemy, sir." said Maine, "for he deserted his first night on guard, which was as soon as any man could."

"And now he hates the bloodybacks p'ison bad," said Riddle, "on account of what he saw and suffered in their lines."

"Dot's true, sir."

"How absolute is his present command over you?" asked Wayne directly.

" 'Tain't ab-so-lute at all," said Barstow. "He's just president over the board of sergeants, but don't make no move, nor give no order, without consulting the rest of us; no more'n ye, yourself, would, sir, without hearing and heeding the opinions of your officers."

"Jove, and you've almost persuaded me that he is a model of the purest patriotism!" exclaimed Wayne impulsively. "Instead of the deep-dyed traitor that he is in f—"

"*Fallen?*" The ejaculation came from all six sergeants. "No, sir!"

"How do you know?" Wayne's glance went keenly from one to another. "What reason have you to be so sure of his loyalty?"

" 'Cause *he* never talked treason," sir," said Maine, "not even when he was pulling hardest for the mutiny."

"In fact, Fallen always spoke again' it," said Riddle, "whenever that sort of talk went 'round in camp. And there's been a deal of it lately, sir, as maybe ye don't know."

"Dot's true," came an interjection.

"And if he's laying to betray us," asked Bannock reasonably, "why didn't he turn the trick at Marbury, night afore last? He could 'a' done it then with perfect safety to himself, for who'd 'a' known it for betrayal? We'd 'a' thought it just anither streak of unco bad luck, such as is forever coming our way."

"And what's the sense in his standing guard, and keeping up discipline, and so forth?" inquired Dockstader, "if he's intending to turn us over to the enemy? 'Twould be sheer waste of time, strength, and risk, if that's his object, which I nowise believe."

"Nor me neider," said Holtzburg.

"And what about that petition he sent off to Congress last night?" demanded Riddle. " 'Twas written like a lawyer, save that it sounded as if his heart was in it. 'Twas a mighty moving appeal."

"Ay, so 'twas!" agreed Bannock, and Holtzburg confirmed the opinion.

"And 'twas good politics, into the bargain," judged Riddle, "if he meant it true.

Cute— cute as could be! For he's a smart man, is Fallen, with good schooling behind him. There was Latin and Greek in the petition. Now, what call would he be having to send Latin and Greek to Congress, if all he wants is to lead us into the British lines?"

"No, sir," said Barstow to Wayne, "there's no doubt about it, he's true blue throughout. For look, if so be he's up to Arnold's trick, he's going about it main clumsily, which he's too smart a man to do; while if he's honest, he's showing up as cunning as a fox. So by this we may know he's honest, I hold."

Wayne looked from Butler to Stewart, and read in their faces the bewilderment that was impressed upon his own.

"It's—it's all undeniable," he hesitated, "but— Oh, come! He can't be loyal! Why, he's Floyd Allen, the Tory of the Grants—"

"*Fallen!*" Again it was a chorus of six, but only three went on: "No, sir!" this time. For Barstow, Holtzburg, and Riddle were gaping at each other in dismay.

"Mein Gott, but it must be true!"

"What was it Jemmy said?" said Barstow excitedly. "A long, thin man, with a hawk's beak, and the eyes of an eagle; a young man still, with a gift for speechifying that he was main fond of indulging—"

"Which is Loyd Fallen to the life, or I'm an Indian and he's another!" finished Riddle.

"What!" Wayne's eyes sparkled as his "dander" rose. "Was Jemmy cognizant of this masquerade—and failed to inform me of it?"

"I don't know, sir," said Barstow, immediately and particularly respectful. "He was just an-asking us, on New Year's night, whether such a man had been seen 'round camp. And we was too dumb to connect Fallen with his description of Tory Floyd at that time! Golly, but things would have gone different, if we had!"

"Jemmy must have suspected the truth," surmised Butler soothingly, "and gone off to camp to make sure of his facts, before saying aught to you about it, General. You recollect that he left us somewhat unceremoniously after delivering his dispatches."

"But why did he say nothing the next dawn?" began Wayne.

"Faith, and the events of that night were enough to knock all remembrance of it out of Jemmy's addled pate!" said Stewart.

"Hmpt!" But the dander was down again. "That is unlikely. His addled pate can hold, separate and clearly, a greater diversity of matters than most sane men's."

"Then he had not time to tell you," said Butler. "For you did send him off somewhat hurriedly, with the dispatch to New Windsor. But what does it matter now? Jemmy's skimble-skambling, God knows where, while Floyd Allen is here at Middlebrook, in command of the Line. What's to be done about it?"

Wayne looked the question at the board, who appeared in no hurry to answer it. They were watching Barstow, who was fathoms deep in thought.

"Well?" Wayne was forced to ask, at length. "Now that you do know with whom you have to deal, what *will* you do about it? Continue him as president of your board?"

He meant it in sarcasm, and lost his breath with Barstow's answer.

"Why, sir," replied the latter very hesitantly, "that's just what I'm a-wondering if we hadn't better do. Ye see, he's a main fine president, even if he be a Tory."

"Yes, he's done mighty well by us so far," reflected Bannock. "And there be them pesky council talks with Congress just ahead of us."

"Which he'll be able to conduct to far better purpose than any of us could," said Dockstader. "For he's got all the proper ways of doing such like, at his finger's tips and his tongue's end."

"Ay, 'twill be the best politics to retain him, on good behavior," summed up Riddle. "Tell him nothing of what we know again' him, but watch him close till we've made him serve our turn."

"But, my God in Heaven! What do you think *he's* contriving at—Lord, help us—what notions!" Wayne was flabbergasted by their ingenious temerity, and paused to regard them with an exasperated admiration.

"Oh, don't you go a-thinking he'll be too smart for us, sir!" said Barstow, not boastingly, but as one who states a fact. "We'll be on our guard against him from now on, and with the first queer-looking move—"

"—it'll be a bullet in the back for Sergeant-major Fallen," finished Bannock with Scotch determination.

Anxiety died under such reassurance. The honesty and simplicity of the men were too evident for even Stewart's customary, protective suspicion to stand before them, while the ingenious use of the suspected leader's particular talents, for the benefit of the Line, indicated that they might well hope to wriggle out of any trouble into which he might try to wile them. Butler looked suddenly relieved, Stewart pinched his lips together firmly, and Wayne chuckled outright.

"Now, how are you off for rations?" the last inquired genially.

"Pretty short," admitted Dockstader, who had been promoted from commissary sergeant of Company B to the same office for the whole Line. "We filled up the knapsacks with powder and ball, 'stead of biscuit, when we assembled on New Year's night, and now there's just enough bread to last one more day afore we start to forage."

Wayne frowned.

"There must be none of that," he said quickly. "If it once starts, the Line will melt like snow under a south wind in March. They'll go foraging off here, and foraging off there, but they won't come back again. And that is the one thing that must not happen. I'll send ye over a couple of bullock-loads from camp, and that'll keep ye going till after you've heard from Congress. And—but this need not be mentioned to Fallen, although all the Line should know that they've started—I'll call off the Connecticuts, too, if you will assure me of one thing."

He paused expectantly.

"And that there is—?" said Maine, with caution.

"That you'll have the Line across the Delaware by tomorrow night."

The men looked at him, puzzled, doubtful, and surprized.

"We can't promise that, sir," said Barstow slowly. "It's already understood in camp that we are to rest for two days when we get to Princeton, unless we are molested. The men are main fagged out after that march through the snow, and the gun-horses need rest just as badly."

Wayne stamped and fumed with cold and impatience.

"But ye must—must!—get them over the river, where they'll be safe from Von Erkheim or any other force Clinton may send against ye! ——, don't ye see why?"

Plainly they did not.

"Look here, then—" And he stepped to a smooth sheet of snow beside the sentry trail, and began to draw lines upon it with his saber's tip. The sergeants, blue and hunched against the cold, looked and listened attentively, while the colonels watched them, unmindful of the drops that formed and froze on the collars about their chins.

"Here, where I make this hole," said Wayne, "is Sir Harry Clinton, in New York City, with ten thousand men. Sir Guy Carleton is *there*, in Canada, with as many more; and yonder in Virginia, is Lord Cornwallis with a third army nigh as large as the other two. Now, when any two of these armies come together across this wretched land, the Continental cause is lost; and what is there, aside from their own sloth, to hold them apart? The French are holed here, for the winter, at Newport and in Connecticut. Unhardened to our frosts they will be useless till the ice goes out. Then there are small commands of the New England troops, scattered through the little Highland strongholds that we held last winter; and the New York Line *there*, at Albany, to guard Washington's rear from Carleton.

"And there's the rub—the New York Line is all we have to guard against Carleton. Before now, we could always trust the hardy mountaineers of the New Hampshire Grants to keep watch and ward over the highway to the north, but we can trust them to do so no longer. Even now, while Tory Floyd Allen tries to gain the control of the Line, for the purpose, as I believe, of selling it to the enemy, his brothers, Ethan and Ira Allen, are negotiating the sale of the Grants to Carleton. They have been the king's pawn in this fatal game we play, and when gone will be sorely missed; for then the New York Line can no longer be moved at will, but must be left there in the north to guard against Carleton.

"Meanwhile, what is there to hold bold, but oh, so sleepy, Sir Harry in check from the south? Only the thin ranks of the New Jersey Line and our scanty selves, hereabouts," and he made another blur in the snow, "in Jersey, ready to sting Sir Harry's tender hide, if he ventures forth to meet Cornwallis; as Washington will sting, if he moves north to join with Carleton. Now, do ye not see why the Pennsylvania Line *must* be saved intact—

intact!—from Congress, the British, and themselves? If the Grants were still with us, you might be given your silly discharges and disbanded without any serious mischief occurring, for the Yorkers could take your place. But with the Grants gone, you are our only movable piece, a queen that threatens in several directions, while General Greene wrests a meager victory—God willing!—for the winter in the south."

He ceased, and leaning on his sword, looked at the sober men.

"I know what ye are thinking," he said slowly, "what any must think when all that is against us is considered at one moment, in this way. Of what use is it for our scanty, starving armies to strive against thirty thousand well appointed, puissant, and desolating men? What can one man hope to do against four? Ye know the answer—sting and fly, sting and fly, as ye have done for these six weary years past. Times in the first ones we'd pray for one blow, one sharp, decisive blow, that would make or break us for good and all! But the commander-in-chief was ever against such counsel. In his wisdom and those early, bitter years, he knew that we were brittle and would inevitably break. Eh, and his heart was bleeding most, when we stole away from Long Island! And now he puts his whole dependence on the fact that though we are few, we are tough—tough as the elder bark—and can endure—anything! For what have we not endured in these hell-sent years?"

His voice rose to a higher key, and his passion with it.

"Fire and frost, famine and nakedness, defeat and betrayal! Powder low in the horn when the battle began, and lack of lint after it. And the marching—God in heaven, the marching! Slipping like ghosts between the snowflakes, the foot so numb one does not know when it strikes the ground, and the legs going only because those behind and beside and before are going too!

"Six years of it, six mortal years of it! And will ye give up now, to go back to plough your bits of land under a Royal Governor and a British flag? Will ye leave the road open for Clinton to join with Cornwallis over the hearthstones of your native State? Will ye, yourselves, join with the Grants to betray Washington to the enemy? Will ye desert *him*, the finest leader God ever gave an otherwise forsaken army, the coolest, the craftiest, the loyalest, the kindest, the most merciful to his enemies—and the worst of these don't wear scarlet—the strongest, the bravest, and the best this land will ever breed! Leave him to be crushed between Clinton and Carleton? For crushed he'll be—he must be!—if ye turn from him. If that's your choice—if that's your choice," Wayne was struggling with suddenly uncontrollable emotion, "go back—go back to your farmsteads; break—break the Line, and—and be ——ed to you!"

He turned away from them, with head bent low; and, after a moment of stupefied silence, the men trampled the map that lay between them and him.

"Wait, sir, wait!" begged Maine excitedly. "We never thought of things being *that* way—"

"More shame to me," boomed Barstow in self-reproach, "for I did, but I put our rights above all else!"

"If we'd kenned the half of it," said Bannock, "we'd stuck closer'n a beaver skin to them infernal huts!"

"We never aimed to lose the war," said Riddle, "just to start a little mutiny to get us what we needed—sort of."

"Dot's true!"

"And now we'll bully the Line to —— and back, if that's your will, sir!" promised Dockstader.

"It isn't," said Wayne, turning to lean on the saber, suddenly weary, all the passion gone from his voice and eyes. "All I ask of you is to get them across the Delaware, beyond all possible danger from Von Erkheim. And to keep them together. Above all keep them together! Can ye do that?"

Barstow's chest heaved with weight of such responsibility.

"We can try, sir," he said slowly.

"We can but try, sir," said Maine soberly.

"We can't do more'n that, sir," said Riddle, and Wayne saluted them in acknowledgment and dismissal.

Six blue-cold hands went to the sergeants' varied head-gear, and then they turned and left him, plunging through the snow toward the bivouac, while he, arms folded, looked after them. On his face was a strange expression, a puzzle of quizzical, mocking, tender admiration, and he laughed a little to himself.

By the trail near which he stood, a log lay, cushioned inches deep with snow. He dropped to its soft surface, his head resting between his hands, as it had in that moment on New Year's night, when his spirit flagged. But now his attitude was of fatigue, utter, heart-slowing weariness of body, rather than of dejection.

"It's the harder task you've set them, Anthony," said gray Stewart, coming up to rest a boot on the end of the log.

"Eh, and don't I know it?" asked the general of a brigade.

"But it's not impossible." Butler, all his bulk a-shake with cold, joined them. "The only thing to be said for it is that nothing is impossible in this —— war."

"For it's no proper war," grumbled Stewart philosophically, "but more like a dream of kelpies and brownies and witch-work and the boggle that lives in the glen, than it is like a proper war such as has been waged, according to the rules and art of the same, since the days of Julius Cæsar. In short, 'tis a war that's plain unbelievable to a rational mind, and, losh, but it's all of a piece! Whether ye contemplate the commander-in-chief, or Ethan Allen, Arnold or Jemmy the Commodore, with his addled brains that think so much clearer than most sane men's, Mad Anthony or his desperate, loyal, disciplined mutineers yon, who're wiling a notorious Tory to introduce 'em to Congress there to demand their really just rights. I'll laugh outright at it all in a minute, and maybe that will wake me up, and I'll hear the kirk-bells ringing beyond in Aberdeen. Will I be gray-headed, I wonder, when I'm roused? Dreams like this one are enough to turn any laddie snow-white!"

"We'd best hunt for fire," said Wayne to Butler. "The cold has got into his brain-pan, and he's mad as Jemmy."

VIII

FOUR days later that tatterdemalion person stood outside an inn near Princeton, and peered inquisitively through a small-paned window. On the ragged back the sun shone warmly from a sky as blue and dense as lapis. Breath hung white in the bright chill of the morning air, and the dazzle from the snow-smooth meadows was a pain above the eyes.

Through the gnarled glass a Continental soldier could be seen, sitting and writing in the inn's "best room" alone. A fire burned on the hearth, and a candle for melting the sealing-wax was alight on a long table that had been improvised from trestles and broad new boards. Rush-bottomed chairs were tilted against the table's sides, and at the end where the soldier sat, were quills, sand, foolscap, a heavy pewter inkstand, wax, and all the paraphernalia of a scribe of the day.

The Continental seemed busily enough engaged with his ink and quill; yet, with every sound that a wooden house will give forth in the winter, his pen was down and his head was up, as he watched the door in a very agony of impatience. When Jemmy at last tapped upon a pane, he jumped as if he had trod upon a water-moccasin.

"Oh, it's only you!" he exclaimed in disappointment, and then called through the glass: "Go 'round to the door, Jemmy—this window's stuffed against the cold." And once more turned his eyes toward the entrance, but no longer with anxiety, hardly with interest, although his greeting, when Jemmy was fairly within, was cordial and familiar.

The Commodore swiftly closed the door, and stood leaning his back against the panels, while he regarded the soldier with a look conspicuously lacking in any sort of respect. But then, Jemmy was never known to show such to any authority, legal or otherwise, nor to any man save one, with whom he came in contact. His Excellency, the commander-in-chief of the Continental Armies, that sphinx-faced immortal, could wring an unwilling reverence from him, but no other man had been able to do likewise, not even his friend and protector, Wayne.

Now he leered and chuckled, according to his custom, while he spoke in his richest brogue.

"Well, well, well!" he crooned mockingly. "Here *is* promotion and a rise in life!"

The soldier wriggled like a hooked catfish, and his leather neck turned a shade ruddier, but Jemmy went mercilessly on.

"Me little friend, Floyd, sitting with his little pink toes in the boots of me friend, Anthony! Eh, but it's strange things, indeed, that the wheel of Time does be turning uppermost! Where is Anthony?"

"God knows!" replied Floyd Allen, with vivacity. "God alone knows where any one is! Unless you do, Jemmy?" He finished with an inflexion of inquiry.

"I? Far from it! I make it me business never to know where anybody is—'tis safest.

But now I'm wanting speech with Anthony."

"He rode off two days ago," answered Allen, without interest. "I couldn't say where, for, etc., after having hung around camp for two days previous, stealing clandestine talks with my staff—"

"Tst, tst, tst, tst!" waggled Jemmy. "'My staff!' Hark to that, now! And what was it he found to say to 'em?"

"He came to tell them the Connecticuts were being sent to coerce us. But that is four days since, and there's been nary a sign of the New Englanders, nor coercion, nor anything else! The rest of the world may be in Tophet, for all I can say to the contrary. I received no answer to the first petition I forwarded to Congress, so I put another on its trail and have heard no more from *that*." Allen was nervously stripping a quill as he talked, his fingers twitching with the strain of inaction. "The enemy lies as quiet as the snow, although there is a report that Clinton moves more troops every day to Staten Island. I counted on being allowed to rest here undisturbed for two days; when I failed to hear from Congress, and the men seemed still reluctant to move, I thought the risk good for three; but I never hoped for a grace of four! By Jupiter, I believe we could stay here for the rest of the winter! 'Tis like a dream, somehow—as if all the world had gone to sleep, and we were the dream they were having."

"Faith, then you're a nightmare to some of 'em!" commented Jemmy. "Will you be moving out of this tomorrow?"

"Why," answered Allen thoughtfully, "as long as the men are eager to remain, and if the enemy continues to keep quiet, I'm for staying on here. This is a good position for our particular purposes. We can threaten Congress and Clinton equally well from Princeton. But some on my staff will give me no rest till we are across the Deleware, for no good reason that I can see. They were for doing so almost as soon as we got to Middlebrook, although then the command were so weary that they could not have marched another mile to save them from the Mohawks. There are some very obstinate and pertinacious men on my staff, Jemmy. Men there is no arguing with! I'm not in command here as I thought to be. There is some influence in camp that works against me, yet, for my life, I can not put my finger on it for a surety!"

"And Anthony hovering on the outskirts? Murder, what innocence!" Jemmy was all admiration at its density.

"He's been gone these two days past," objected Allen. "Although his aids are still at the manse, teaching the minister's daughters wicked, worldly songs. But they know no more of his whereabouts than I do. Or say so, at any rate."

"I can't stay longer listening to the like of that!" decided Jemmy, suddenly. "I'm thin-drawn for the want of food, drink, and 'baccy. Have ye a bit of the last?"

"—— a bit," answered Allen, and then he added in a tone of pure curiosity. "Where the —— have you been keeping yourself, Jemmy? I haven't seen ye for a coon's age."

"Tut!" reproved Jemmy, with his hand on the latch. "Only the frogs that croak to the moon in May shall be told where I've been a-traveling. But it wasn't aboard the frigate that's carrying Arnold to the Chesapeake, nor yet a-stealing figs from the mocking-birds, where the south wind swings in the hanging moss—"

Allen threw himself back in his chair with a sigh of resignation. Jemmy threw up his chin, with a double dose of malice agleam in his eye, and continued in his most irritatingly indirect fashion.

"—nor yet out of the sunset, where the winter howls and tears at the flimsy doors of the lodges, in its haste to be at the warm meat within."

"Which means, I presume," interrupted Allen, "that you've been north." He looked up wistfully, anxiously, inquiringly. "D'ye bring me no news from home, Jemmy?"

"I met a man," said Jemmy, "a little man, with lynx eyes that ye could not see behind, under a tall, white hill. We stood on our shadows a fortnight back, and he asking me to be putting *this* into the hands of a wayward lad, kin to himself, and with a name of ill omen, if so be that I should meet with the same."

He balanced the fat, nearly square letter on the ball of one forefinger, and Allen's chair slammed on its back as the sergeant-major rose from it.

"Give it here, Jemmy!" He laughed nervously in his eagerness. "'Tis the first word I've had from home in seven months!"

Jemmy paid less than no heed to this. He stood absorbed in a thought of his own, which presently he voiced.

"Floyd, boy," he mused, "of all the subtility and craft that I have ever seen in council hall, or about the council fire, there is none to match with that of your kin, the Allens! They plan to rook their friends, their allies, and their enemies as a pair of Greeks will rook one pigeon after another in the gaming-houses of London town. The very brazen impudence of the coup insures its success!— And all for a tuppenny, hapenny bit of rocky countryside they call Vermont! Ye'd conceit it was Hy-Brasyl, itself, or the Land of Women, from the fuss they raise over it!"

"Vermont? Vermont!" Allen's laugh was loverlike. "Give me that letter, Jemmy!"

Jemmy tossed it to him, and he tore the first sheet in his haste to be rid of the wax. The Commodore opened the door, and then turned on the threshold, crow's-feet limning about his eyes.

"Floyd boy," he averred solemnly, wagging a finger in time to his words, "they're calling me mad in the huts, but let me tell you there's a madder man than meself in these Continental Armies, and his name is Anthony Wayne! Och, and the astonishing devices of the man, the strange precautions, and the extraordinary revenges that he does be taking! They prove plain as the nose on your face that he's as crazy as a loon in May, moonstruck as a hero of eld, mad as a drunken god! May the devil admire him, for the rest of us must!" With which he withdrew, for he saw that his words went unattended.

Alone, Allen laughed the low and tender laugh again and again, as his eyes raced across the closely written sheets. It was the grand passion of his breed that moved him. He was in love with a lake and a mountain range, and suddenly foresaw the consummation of his hope. He chuckled and crooned over the screed for three readings; and then another, less pleasing, thought brought a petulant gloom to his brow, which he tried to shrug off impatiently. Finally he rapped out the devil's tattoo on the boards, while he muttered irritably: "Eh, and what makes him so obstinate! There will be heartbreak in it for him, if they turn this trick." And he continued to meditate gloomily until hurried footsteps sounded on the slippery path outside the door.

Instantly he turned, all expectation, toward it, but his face fell once more when Barstow and Maine entered in a hot haste, and his thought drifted again as he absently answered Barstow's query—

"No, no news as yet."

Barstow looked at Maine in astonishment.

"What!" he demanded. "Why I saw the couriers' horses, myself, being led off smoking hot!"

"And it's all over camp that they've come in," Maine confirmed him.

Again the door burst open, and the rest of the board crowded in; Riddle crying out, even as he rubbed the dazzle from his eyes:

"What's the word from Congress, Fallen? Have ye opened the dispatches yet?"

"Fallen says the couriers have not been here," said Barstow, before he could answer the question.

"Sure they have had time enough, and to spare," said Bannock, "if we have."

"Ay," muttered Barstow suspiciously, "there's been time for them to come and go."

And the others all turned on the sergeant-major a look that might well have caused him a grim unease, if he had seen it. But he was righting an upset chair, and now sat down in it, slipping a letter into a pocket of his coat as he said indifferently:

"No one has come in here, save Jemmy the Commodore, some half an hour since. He was asking for Wayne, and carried a letter from my folks to me; but he's the only soul I have seen all morning."

"But the horses," insisted Barstow, as he took his place at the foot of the table, and the rest settled down along the sides. "Jemmy does not ride."

"Ye don't suppose they were taken to the manse, do ye?" suggested Riddle.

"By ——, if they have—"

Allen sprang angrily to his feet, and marched to the door, but before he reached it, it was shaken by a tremendous and importunate salute.

"Come *in!*" he shouted, and flung it wide

IX

TWO blue-cloaked strangers stepped by him, and halted uncertainly, blind in the comparative dark of the room after the dazzle from the meadows without. Their black hats were pulled low over their eyes to shield them from the blaze on the snow, their collars were high about their chins to shut out the brisk cold of the morning, and one would have been hard put to say with certainty whether they were soldiers or citizens.

Allen came forward from the door, with an air of breeding that he did not wear when alone with his mates.

"You are, sirs, the couriers from Congress?"

The taller man fumbled with the clasp of his cloak as he answered.

"Couriers, yes, but not from Congress. I carry a message to you from—" and the cloak slipped off to show the scarlet glory of the British uniform "—your King!" With the last word, he removed his hat in reverence and salutation.

For twenty seconds not a breath was drawn. Every man at the table was held rigid, as if by enchantment, while, curiously enough, when his eyes had cleared, the royal officer seemed as overcome as any present. Allen clawed feebly at the table edge, as together he and the taller emissary gasped out—

"Floyd Allen!"

"Floyd Allen?" gaped the board in bewilderment.

"Floyd Allen?" drawled the officer's companion, a stout, blond man in a captain's uniform, who blinked white eyelashes stupidly at his coadjutor.

"Ay," answered the first officer, recovering himself. " 'Tis a scapegrace nephew and godson of my own, whom I have not seen for these four years past, —— take it!" And the look he cast upon his excited godson was compound of affection, exasperation, severity, and frank pleasure at the encounter.

There could be no reasonable doubt of the relationship between them. From the bold, delicate hawk-noses to their nervous heels, they were cast in the same mold. But the captain was gray at the temple, and possessed of a tried and calm assurance that the sergeants' president was even then in the process of acquiring. The latter now sat down in his appointed place, and motioned the board to return to theirs.

"Eh?" thought the stout Britisher laboriously aloud. "Oh, now I smoke it! He's been fighting here with the rebels under the name of Loyd Fallen. Clever, oh clever, egad!"

"But you," said Barstow to the man opposite himself, "you called out, too."

"Naturally," answered the captain for his godson, "since I, also, am known as Floyd Allen."

"Or more commonly," said the sergeant-major, "as Tory Allen."

"But never as Loyd Fallen," said the captain, adding with mordant scorn, "I've never seen the need to change my name."

"You've never been ashamed of it!" retorted the rebel hotly.

"True, true," agreed the captain, with smooth and irritating calm, "I, alone of all my family, have held steadily loyal to my King, and may face without a blush every moment and act of my life. But I did not come here to reproach you with the insane opinions that you early imbibed from your guardians, my brothers, and for which you, yourself, can hardly be blamed. These are weightier matters on hand than a boy's natural folly."

"Ay," said the other Britisher heavily, "let's get through with our business first, and then ye can bring the youngster to a sense of his duty at your leisure." He wheeled directly on the board, and addressed them collectively and in a kindly condescending tone. "Ye must understand, my men, that we've come to lay a few unsurmountable facts before ye. Yes, egad, facts that ye can't get around, wriggle as ye may—"

Determinedly Captain Allen took the floor away from him, for the expression with which the sergeants had received this speech would have daunted any man less stupid than Captain Nicholas Bulkley, of the Royal Forces. The sergeant-major alone seemed to enjoy the stout Englishman's eloquent lack of tact, and his pleasure in it was but too clearly malicious.

"Yes," said Captain Allen smoothly, "we have ridden out to ask you to consider the advantages of returning to your true allegiance, His Gracious Majesty, King George of England."

He intoned the title as the other Floyd would have said "Vermont," or Wayne, "Washington."

"Or of continuing a vain and hopeless struggle for an independence that you, yourselves, do not truly desire. For six years, now, you have been fighting against your King and destiny—and to what has it brought you? This day you stand deserted by your officers, without three days' rations left in your knapsacks, while you anxiously await the sour frown of a Quaker-ridden parliament, that is about to descend upon you for rebelling—and justly rebelling!—against their neglect and parsimony. Faith, and I do not see how you could be in a worse case as long as you had breath between your ribs! While, on the other hand, here stands your true allegiance offering full pardon, and the liberty to return to his home, to any man who will openly return to his King and His Majesty's servants—"

"—and a bounty of twenty pound to each one who 'lists in the Royal Forces," interjected Captain Bulkley. "You're forgetting that point, Allen, and, 'gad, it's a good one! Think it over, my men—good food, warm coats, and twenty pound in—"

"Yes, yes," said Captain Allen hastily. "As Captain Bulkley says, for all who wish to take service in the Royal Forces, there is employment and reward. But your King stands ready to offer more than this. The lands of those disloyally in arms against him are soon to be sequestrated. From these lands one thousand acres, in any province that may be named, will be ceded and deeded to any man who aids in returning a rebel brigade to their lawful sovereign."

His glance traveled around the table, learning little, for every face was as blank as an Indian's or an Englishman's. He drew out a large, printed sheet, which he unfolded and handed to Barstow.

"Look at this," he requested. "It is the proclamation of amnesty and reward that insures your full forgiveness from your indulgent king."

"Is it written so?" cynically asked Sergeant Allen, from the head of the table.

The captain bit in more than his lip, and something stirred on his temple, although he appeared not to have heard, being absorbed in other papers that he still held in his hand. Ambassadors from monarchies to democracies quickly learn to swallow insult without a grimace, as do ambassadors from democracies to monarchies.

" 'Tis naught but the proclamation of amnesty that was posted in Philadelphia three years ago," Barstow answered the president of the board.

Captain Bulkley had approached unnoticed from the rear, and now he suddenly thrust a large, white hand over the sergeant's shoulder to point to a paragraph low on the sheet.

"Look," he said, "there 'tis, just there—twenty pound — twenty pound in hard money!—to any rebel soldier who'll come over and take the King's shilling. Think it over, my man. Twenty pound in gold!"

Barstow turned his face to the vacant one so near his own, and even stout Captain Bulkley, of the Royal Forces, was startled by the expression that he saw there.

"Twenty pounds!" said the sergeant, without parting his teeth. "Wasn't that what Burgoyne was an-offering for babies' scalplocks?"

"Ugh! Not babies' only—any 'cursed rebel scalp," said Bulkley, his jaw sagging with his unaccustomed surprize. "Eh? Why, what's a-matter?" For Captain Allen's hand had fallen heavily on his shoulder, and now drew him forcibly out of the discussion.

"Has the gentleman nothing more to say?" asked Sergeant Allen, with ruthless courtesy.

"No, nothing," answered his uncle, his face impenetrable, although a purple vein suddenly pulsed on his temple. "Nor have I. Read, and you will learn how you will be rewarded by a king whose dearest desire is to be a father to his people."

"Yes!" said Barstow, slapping the proclamation till it cracked. "This here promises twice as much as we *begged* for in '73 and '4! Our king—and he were our king, then—was a dern sight more like a stepfather afore the war began."

" 'Cording to his politics," remarked Riddle, "he loves rebellious children better'n the obedient kind."

"Wherefore," Sergeant Allen coolly added, "it is manifestly to our advantage to keep the paternal flame alight by continuing in rebellion."

"For," summed up Dockstader, "we're likely to be sent to bed without victuals or candle, if so be we turn dutiful again."

"Hark here, my men—" began Bulkley, mistily indignant, but Allen bade him be silent with a savage rancor that astonished him for the second time that morning.

The vein lay like a purple worm on the Loyalist's temple. Almost it seemed to writhe there, but his voice was quiet, and his hand steady, as he laid the other papers before Barstow.

"Here," he said, beautifully controlled, "are seven deeds for seven thousand acres of rebel land, the boundary lines not drawn, and the names left blank."

"Ay," said Barstow, "not even the king's is on 'em."

"He, he!" snickered Bulkley. "If ye take my advice, ye'll have the cash in hand. 'Twas the way Arnold had it."

Captain Allen's control went with an hysterical cry.

"God!" he cried. "God, *why* was this fool sent with me!"

"Because, uncle," answered a cool voice from the other end of the table, "God is on our side, and therefore careful to always saddle a Burgoyne, or one like yourself, with two or three hundred of such as this. Otherwise the war would have ended long since in our destruction."

When Captain Allen spoke again, he had regained himself.

"Ay, so it would," he replied, "and, in spite of the handicap, so it will, and that very soon. And that is another point of the present matter that I recommend especially to your consideration. The Continental cause is crumbling like an ice dam in March. Your paper is not worth the ink with which it is printed; your credit in France is so low that Franklin will never be able to wile another sou from the benevolent Louis' coffers. The French troops, from whom you hoped so much, are militarily useless for six months of the year, and a mighty drain upon your slender resources all the time. The wise and loyal merchants of the larger towns are already putting pressure on Congress to accede to our terms, and thus bring this wasteful struggle to an end; but, before it can be done by those means, the finish will have come in another way. For Washington, the arch rebel, will soon be crushed, ground, and blown to the four winds, between Clinton and Carleton; for the Grants—the keystone of the north—are returning to their true allegiance!"

He laughed; and the sound was like a belated echo of his nephew's glee of the hour before; and strode around the table to stand over his godson, his hands pressed compellingly on the younger man's shoulders. The latter neither moved nor looked up, but fingered something concealed in the pocket of his shabby blue coat.

"Eh, Floyd boy," the captain commanded coaxingly, "give up, give up this mad, unequal struggle! As your uncles have done, and as your father would have done, if he had lived. Of the Allens you alone are now clinging to this sinking cause, and I would have us face the sun whole and entire, when the time comes to accept Washington's sword. You said a moment since that you were shamed by the name I gave you, but that same name will buy you peace and place and plenty from your true sovereign. Speak to your command—you best know how—and promise them homes and acres near your own, in the new province, the province that is about to be the Dominion of Champlain. A royal colony, conceived, wrought, and ruled by your kindred, the Allens!"

He ceased, and there followed a long and utterly silent pause. The board sat back, withdrawn from and indifferent to what seemed to be a tribal foregathering. Captain Bulkley patted in a yawn with two fingers, bored by this which he comprehended not. Young Floyd sat looking at a packet that turned between his long and nervous fingers. He seemed to be musing over some extraneous matter, rather than hesitating over an immediate course of action. Suddenly he returned the letter to its former place, shaking off his godfather's compelling palm as he straightened.

"Pennsylvanians," he demanded, "are you ready for the question?"

A growled and sullen "ay" was the response.

"Then—are we Arnolds?" he inquired coolly, "and, if so, what is our price?"

They were inarticulate, these men, in their emotion, but their meaning was not obscure. Captain Bulkley glanced apprehensively over one shoulder, as if to assure himself of a retreat. Captain Allen stepped quickly back, white with wrath, his head held high, and spoke bitterly to his godson, who twisted in his chair to face him.

"I'm done with ye!" he cried. "I'm done with ye for a scurvy, canting, ungrateful whelp! You might have been rich and honored, you might have lived happy and at ease in the new province, you might have been royal governor, itself! But now you'll never look again upon the land for which you've sacrificed your name and credit, and the loyalty you owe your king!"

Young Floyd struck the board under his hand in a passion of disgust.

"King, king, king!" he snarled. "I'm ill of that word 'king'! What is a fat and crazed old man, the sea itself away, to me? Curse your king, Floyd Allen!"

Whiter yet, Captain Allen bent across Maine's shoulder to repeat the gesture.

"And curse your country, Floyd Allen!" he rejoined. "The land from which you're exiled while I live! I'll save ye from the rope, when the surrender comes, for a king's officer can not let his nephew and godson hang, but there'll be no room for such traitors as ye in the new king's province of Champlain! And as for these," his contemptuous eyes were swept about the board, "they'll e'en have to lie on the bed they have made for them. And when ye are dancing on naught," he addressed the sergeants directly, "with hempen collars about your necks, I trust ye will perceive more truly the disadvantages of serving your country—your cause, forsooth!—above your king!"

The look of anger faded from young Floyd's brow, and the blood washed from his cheek-bones.

"Why," began Barstow slowly, "as for them there hempen collars—" and he stopped abruptly, as Sergeant Allen sank sickly back in his chair.

"That's the penalty," continued Riddle, "for a-tampering with the loyalty of the troops."

"If the charge can be proved," said Dockstader, after a moment; and no one found more to add.

Captain Allen's face had cleared of all emotion. Dark, still, impenetrable, his glance traveled from one man to another—from Barstow lowering uneasily at one end of the table, to the shaking man at the other; from his godson to Captain Bulkley, who stood gaping slightly as he played with his sabretache. Young Floyd jerked himself upright, and spoke in a thick and smothered voice.

"God help me! God help me, for I—I—can not save you, godfather!"

He slumped forward, his arms outflung upon the table. One hand swept over the inkstand, and the black fluid slowly spread to the edge of the table, poured over it, thinned to a thread, and dripped slowly and more slowly to the floor. As slowly Bulkley gathered that all was not going exactly as had been anticipated.

"What's a-matter, Allen?" he asked vacantly. "Won't they take the money? Maybe 'tain't enough."

There was no answer. Captain Allen was staring into the black reflections of the pool on the table. The sergeant-major did not move, hardly seemed to breathe. The board were manifesting a growing perplexity. They glanced uneasily from Barstow to their president, and then back to the senior sergeant again. He was worriedly considering the crown of Sergeant Allen's disordered head, and finally spoke, as if realizing that no help nor action was to be expected from the other end of the table.

"I—I presume," he said doubtfully, "that the first thing to be done is to put 'em under arrest."

The strain the board was under was relieved by this suggestion for definite, concrete action.

"Ay, that'll be it," they chorused, and Barstow hastily left the room to call for sentries.

"Ye know, Allen," hinted Bulkley, "that if 'tain't enough, Sir Harry said we might raise the bid to—"

"Be silent!" bade Captain Allen sternly, and went on with his own dark meditation, while the board relapsed into a suffering of discomfort.

In desperation each sought and found some futile, blessed thing to do. Riddle nibbled the dried ink from an old, worn-out nib, his face puckering with the gall-bitter taste. Dockstader intently studied a deed that he held upside down before him. Holtzburg drew out a yard-wide, blue calico handkerchief, with which he mopped his laboring brow. Maine hacked at the board before him with a hunting knife, and cleared his throat loudly; whereupon the rest turned toward him, eager for further suggestion, but he failed them. When Barstow at last returned with a brace of sentries, there was another mighty heave of relief, and all eyes gratefully watched as the guards went to the officers.

Captain Allen was to be spared as much humiliation as was possible, for the sake of the other who bore his ill-omened name. The Britishers were quietly touched on the arms, not on the shoulders, and Barstow stood aside to let them pass him.

"I thank you," Captain Allen acknowledged to the senior sergeant, and, after another long look at the figure spread across the table's end, was turning toward the door, when Bulkley spoke in an old bewilderment.

"I say, Allen, are ye sure they won't take the money? Why, according to all report they're starving!"

Allen whirled on the table.

"All I ask," he cried passionately, "*all* that I ask is that I may see this bleating swine hanged first!"

And the sentries led the prisoners out, leaving a ghastly silence behind them.

At last the sergeant-major broke it, his words somewhat muffled by both his emotion and his position.

"How much, O God, how much does a man owe to his country?"

"He don't *owe* nothing to it," Barstow answered for the Deity.

"Why should he?" asked Riddle.

Allen pulled himself upright.

"Then why are we here?" he demanded fiercely. "Doing what we're going to do?"

" 'Cause if we don't," said Barstow reasonably, "we'll live and die with the British like millstones 'round our necks. Which ain't to be seriously considered. But what ye give to your country is a free gift, whether it be much or little. There's nothing of a debt or a duty about it, and the measuring of it is in your own hand and heart, with naught but the last to call ye to account for the size of the measure."

"Then the measure of my devotion has been reached," said Allen, pushing back his chair. "In this matter you must act without me. I can't help to hang my own godfather."

He started, amid a storm of protest, for the small, plank door that always opened beside a central fireplace.

"Come back here, Fallen, come back!"

"Ye can't leave us in the lurch thataway!"

"You're the only one who knows what to do in a case like this!"

"Or how to go about it!"

"Ye *got* to act now!"

"We can't move without ye!"

"It wouldn't be good politics!"

"Dot's true!"

"What with the Lord alone kenning all the next twenty-four hours may bring forth—"

"—and Wayne gone off, God knows where!"

"And Clinton moving more and more troops to Staten Island!"

"And the couriers not come in yet!"

"And the Grants gone over to the enemy!"

The last checked Allen, and he turned back to the table.

"Oh, the Grants," he said, with a calm that was reassuring, "I'd forgot; they're not going over to the enemy. Eh, and how could he have swallowed such a bait! Why, the British kept Ethan for two years in a prison ship!" It was as if he had said "under torture." He laid a chunky letter before Barstow. "Here is a full account of what they," with a jerk of his head toward the north, "are about. But, in God's name, let it go no further than this room."

"But Floyd Allen," said Barstow, fumbling at the tucked-in ends of the packet, " 'tother one—Tory Floyd—said as how all his brothers had returned to their true allegiance—"

"Ye'll keep the truth from him?" requested Allen quickly. "Ye see Ira and Ethan were using him to trick Carleton, as they'd use the devil, himself, to get them what they want for Vermont! But it would go hard with my godfather to learn that he'd lost his game, because he had been duped by his own kindred. So why tell him aught of it, now that he need—need never—" He stopped short.

"Ay, if ye say so," said Barstow, not looking at him, and presently they heard his toes stubbing against each riser as he mounted the narrow stair.

Barstow spread out the foolscap, and began to laboriously read aloud the slender, slanting, malformed hand that covered the numerous sheets.

X

"Arlington, Dec. 20th, 1780.

Floyd, My Nephew:—Jemmy, the Commodore, has just come into these variously afflicted territories, on business of his own, and I take this opportunity to send you, by his trustworthy hand, information concerning the political and military situations that confront us, the guardians of the struggling and infant State of Vermont, lest you misapprehend certain rumors that will, I trust, soon be rife in the land, and curse those of your kindred, as traitors, who but pursue their duty in the twisted course that is all that an ungracious fate has left open to us.

Less than a year ago, then, I received, from Colonel Beverly Robinson, of the Royal Forces, a proposal from which my patriotic mind revolted in just horror; but which, subsequently, it was led, for reasons far from those anticipated by the sender, to entertain. The epistle was delivered to me in the streets of Arlington, by a disguised member of the British Army; and possibly it was my true duty to have arrested and consigned this emissary to the sentence that was justly his, then and there, but the heart falters over a public duty that must be done over a brother's body, and I accepted the letter and the woodsman's tunic as alike genuine and no forgeries. However, after consultation with your uncle Ira and the patriotic governor of this sovereign State, it was agreed that any written answer to such a communication must be impolitic, and word to that effect was delivered to the bearer of the missive. In ways that I need not mention, save that they were of the discreetest, I continued, through the year, to receive proposals from Col. Robinson; and these, always at the instance of my brother, Ira, I did not forthrightly refuse, as it was my natural inclination, but led the King's advocate to believe that I, disgusted by the indifference and ingratitude of Congress, was only held from embracing his offers by the fear of committing a dishonorable act for a comparatively valueless compensation. Under this impression, he has raised his offers (which began by being most liberal, I must concede the bloodybacks) again and again, to the point where it is tacitly understood that I may name my own terms.

Now, we are about to arrange an armistice, ostensibly for the purpose of exchanging prisoners, actually to cover further and more particular negotiations concerning the sale of Vermont to the commandant of Canada. I have been insistent that the territory to be declared neutral during these parleys must extend from our eastern boundary to the Mason Line in New York; over which the redcoats boggled badly, but to no purpose, for I was immovable, and our territory in such dispute, by so many different States and parties, that we may *claim* what contiguous lands we please, and be sure of at least one adversary who will leap to deny the rights of some other or our own, thus establishing uncertainty of all claims. Now, as you must plainly perceive, my nephew, this armistice will be of great advantage to the Continental Armies, for the neutral territory, over which no hostile troops may be moved while negotiations are in progress, lies across the only route that leads directly from the north. 'Twill keep Carleton bottled up in Canada, tight as a woodpecker nailed into its hole, for as long as the discussions continue; and Ira intends to extend them over an indefinite period, possibly for some months, which he can well do by exercising his ingenious mind in avoiding any definite conclusions. Faith, and at that, I'd back him against the wiliest Mohawk in York! But in these ways, my nephew, we hope to wrest advantage from our very woes, and send the slings of an outrageous fortune against our enemies.

In the meantime, the worse the world thinks of the matter, the better for Vermont. It is our desire to so disturb and trouble the minds of the respectable gentlemen of Congress, that, when I forward them indubitable, written evidence of Britain's liberality, they may be induced to follow and exceed her offers; for fear of the consequences, if for no more noble, or generous reasons. And while I must grieve that any should suspect my sincere attachment to the cause of my country, yet I do not hesitate to say that I am fully grounded in opinion, that Vermont has an indubitable right to agree on terms of a cessation of hostilities with Great Britain, provided the United States persist in refusing her application of a union with them: for Vermont, of all people, would be the most miserable, were she obliged to defend the independence of the United (claiming) States, and they, at the same time, at full liberty to overturn and ruin the independence of Vermont. I am as resolutely determined to defend the independence of Vermont, as Congress are that of the United States; and rather than fail, will retire with the hardy Green Mountain Boys into the desolate caverns of the mountains, and wage war with human nature at large. For such must be my course, if Congress continue to refuse us, as I would rather die a hundred deaths by torture, than come again under the rule of the perfidious British, from whom we all, and myself in particular, have suffered such grievous misfortunes.

Jemmy informs us that you continue to refuse the name your godfather gave you, for reasons which I comprehend, although I do not sympathize with them. It is for you to live down, by your own honorably patriotic conduct, whatever onus my brother has put upon that name, rather than to deny it, in a fashion many must consider as cowardly, or at least shamefaced. Jemmy also avers that you are in good health, and once more rising to a position of trust and influence in a new command. You might go far, if you would learn to curb that spirit of insubordination that has hitherto brought ruin on all you have attempted, driving you from the mild rule of friends and kindred, and bringing you blame from superiors, who, otherwise, would be but too glad to praise. For your abilities are good, and when once you have perceived the true nature of, and necessity for, discipline, and the heavy responsibilities that a man assumes when he refuses it, I hold that you will become a man of parts, a credit to your friends, and an honor to the land that bred you.

Burn this letter as soon as you have grasped the contents, and use your discretion in speaking of them, remembering that our friends have ever caused us more trouble than our foes, and that our foes encompasseth us as with a girdle of iron. Your uncle Ira desires his affection and service to you—and that in spite of the haughty way in which you treated him, when I was in captivity, and could not come between your hot spirits. He is to hand this to Jemmy, on his way to town; I would not dare to send it by any other hands, but that the Commodore is as trustworthy as yourself I am persuaded by long experience.

Your uncle Heber is dead of a decline taken after the fatigues of the evacuation of Ticonderoga; for which reason Jemmy's report of your strength and hardihood pleases us, for too many of us have gone in the way poor Heber did. That you may remain safe and well, my nephew, is the wish, if not the prayer, of one who will always subscribe himself,

Your humble, obedient servant, and
Ever affectionate uncle,
ETHAN ALLEN.

Sergeant-major Loyd Fallen.

There was a gaping pause as Barstow refolded the plot that would have done credit to a Jesuit. Only Riddle seemed fully to comprehend its significance, and it left him speechless in an ecstasy of admiration.

"Glory be!" he broke forth at last. "Did ye ever hear the like, for pure politics! If only we had men like them in Congress, we might get somewhere, or something!"

"Losh, but they're all alike," said Bannock, in a deep reflection. "Ethan and Ira, Floyd and Fallen—bold as brass and cunning as weasels for to gain their own ends."

"Dot's true," nodded Holtzburg, "and settles up der Grants—Vermont, as dey call 'em—very satisfactory from Ant'ony's point of view. But vhat help is it to us, vid dose Britishers ve got under guard outside? It don't tell us none how to deal vid dem."

"Fallen's got to come down, and give us a hand!" exclaimed Barstow angrily.

"He won't do it," opined Maine.

"And ye can't exactly blame him," added Riddle. " 'Tain't good politics to ask a man to hang his own godfather."

"And I suppose we *are* going to hang 'em?" asked Dockstader doubtfully.

"Why, some one said as how that was the penalty for tampering with the loyalty of the troops," said Bannock, looking around the table.

"Well, let's do it out of hand, then!" Maine spoke with nervous impatience. "And get the danged business over with!"

"Good Lord, we can't do that!" vetoed Barstow.

" 'Twouldn't be good politics," agreed Riddle.

"Losh, why not?" asked Bannock. "They're nothing but Britishers!"

"Yes, and Clinton would make it an excuse to string up a dozen or so of our men, who are prisoners in their hands," pointed out Barstow.

"Golly, I'd forgot that!" said Maine soberly.

Bannock drew a red mate to Holtzburg's handkerchief, and wiped his face.

"Lord, whatever we do we got to be mighty careful!" he perceived.

There was a silence, heavy with their uncertainty. They were like men playing chess for the first time. They had been told what the moves were, and were just beginning to guess what manifold combinations and ingenious strategies a seasoned player might be making therewith. And in Clinton, they had an antagonist familiar to instinct with every convention of the game, although he could hardly be called a player of marked ability.

"Look a-here," said Barstow, when five minutes more of futile discussion had lagged by, "we're in a tight fix, and whatever we do we're going to think it's wrong after it's done. Let's send the prisoners, along with these here precious documents, over to the manse, and ask young Farquar and Captain Ryan to take charge of 'em, till Wayne comes back."

"And then he'll know how to deal with 'em proper!" concluded Riddle with enthusiasm. "That's the billet!"

Relievedly the sergeants gathered up the scattered deeds and torn proclamation, and passed them to Barstow, who tied them into a packet, which he delivered to Maine.

"Take 'em along, Johnny," he ordered. "And take an extra guard with ye. Them Allens, royal red or true blue, are slippery as elm!"

"They're all that," agreed Maine, and then saluted as he left the room. A second or two later, his figure passed the window on the way to the guard-house.

"I reckon this better be burnt, like Ethan Allen says," considered Barstow, and he tore the letter to ribbons, which he held, one after another, in the flame of the candle.

"By jinx!" ejaculated Dockstader, watching the strips writhe and blacken, while he followed up a previous train of thought. "I wouldn't walk in a general's boots for anything ye could offer me!"

"Me neither!" agreed Riddle. "I never guessed until this week how blamed hard it is to issue orders."

"It's a sure sight easier to obey 'em," said Bannock. "I can see that plain enough now."

"Dey must be loony, like," thought Holtzburg, "who go about scheming and plotting to get der command."

"I reckon Fallen has had his bellyful, for one while," said Riddle, "with the way things have come out for him and his godfather."

"Glory be, but I wish Anthony'd come back!" complained Barstow, suddenly dropping the last flaming shred on to the table top. "Now, what took that blamed candle, to make it gutter thataway? It 'most burnt my thumb off!"

"He must 'a' been madder'n usual," judged Riddle critically, "to go off and leave us alone, at a time like this."

"Where the —— d'ye suppose he's got to?" inquired Bannock.

"Here," said Wayne, throwing wide the door, "after some little hard riding."

The board rose to a swift attention as he strode in upon them, sweat white upon his boots, his chin up, and his eyes sparkling with cold, vigor and vivacity. As he swept a mocking, ominous glance about the table, and drew in his breath for a culmination, the two colonels, followed by Van Kuren, stepped quietly into the background, shutting the door on the cold without.

"You're an impious, impertinent, insubordinate crew!" Wayne announced flatly. "And now it would be very like your impudence to ask me where I have been!"

XI

"GENERAL," began Riddle eagerly, "there's been some main queer facts a-coming out about Fallen since ye left us. Facts that prove him to be as loyal as yourse—"

"Silence, there in the ranks!" Wayne rapped out, and never a man appeared less irascible than he as he said it. Plainly he acted a part—very badly. "Why, in God's name, should I take any interest in this triply condemned Line, or the facts concerning Fallen? Particularly, as I am already aware of 'em, thanks to Jemmy, the Commodore. No, *I*'ve been in Philadelphia, laying your case before Congress; and, gentlemen—dash it all, I mean, soldiers of Pennsylvania—I did not handle you as a lynx does a hedgehog. Not at all! I painted you in your true colors, as desperate men, war-hardened and sullen-mad, ready and prepared to use any means to secure your ends. 'Obstinate' was the word I employed; ay, I termed you 'obstinate,' obstinate as a Mohawk at the stake! Nor could I swear—as I had left Princeton somewhat hastily, and in fear of my life, as you *might* say—that you did not carry powder enough to blow the Continental Congress, *and* the Council of Pennsylvania, clear to blue blazes, if the project should occur to you."

Something else incomprehensibly occurred to him, and he forgot his lines completely. He spoke in a tone, confidential and official, to Dockstader.

"Dockstader, did you get those rations that I had sent over from Morristown yesterday?"

"Yes, sir, 'bout noon," said the commissary-sergeant.

"And there's been no foraging?"

"Not a single case, sir."

"Good, good!" cried Wayne vigorously. "That is," as he recalled his errand, "why the —— should I care whether this ——, mutinous command starves or founders? 'Tis the country folk that I am concerned for— What I mean to say is—er—gentlemen—I mean, soldiers of the Line—er—er—er—where the deuce had I got to, anyway?"

"The Continental Congress, and the Council of Pennsylvania," reminded Colonel Stewart from the background.

"Ah, yes, yes!" said Wayne, recalling his discourse. "In detail, then, and very, very clearly, I drew the desperate nature of your enterprise, and its entire practicability, unless your preposterous demands should be acceded to; the which I stated to be—viz., to wit:" He ticked them off on his fingers. "First and foremost, honorable discharge for all those who have served three years, or more. Next, certificates to cover deficits in pay. I'm sorry, but ye'll have to be content with that. They showed me that the treasury is as bare of gold as a toad of feathers, so I was obliged to take the paper or nothing. Thirdly, to furnish you forthwith somewhat to cover your nakedness, lest ye put the honorable gentlemen to the blush. And lastly, to give a furlough of forty days to any undischarged man who desired it. Nay, don't cheer, don't thank me! I couldn't keep 'em from giving it to you. 'Twill practically disband the Line till the end of February, and so guarantee that their precious hides are safe from your united desperations for exactly that length of time."

His sniff spoke eloquently his true opinion of the discreet Congress.

"Oh, yes, so I talked of you, till plump President Reed twittered like an owl-cry in the frost! Yet he saw it as his duty, after some little persuasion, some little flummery, and many, many guarantees, on my part, to ride out in person to treat with you— First, making his will, while declaring nobly—nobly, sirs!—that he had but one life and it belonged to his country, and then appointing a committee of Mr. Miller, Justice Dare, and General Sullivan—the last at my special request, for I reckoned it necessary to have at least one well-informed man upon it—to share his duties and his dangers. We rode forth in company yestereve from Philadelphia, conversing most amiably on various topics."

A remininscent smile lifted his lip.

"I recall that I dwelt with some eloquence on the hardy valor of our native province, till Colonel Reed went quite white with emotion. I have never orated with such effect before."

"I found that the Justice," said Stewart meditatively, "labored under some erroneous notions concerning the limitations of military discipline. It was necessary to explain that a body of armed men were in a position to take their own way in all matters, and that it was a wise superior who anticipated their intentions by his orders.

I could give classical examples—the Justice being something of a scholar—to prove it."

"The Honorable Mr. Miller and myself," said Colonel Butler, somewhat troubled by a cough, "discoursed on the lengths to which desperate, obstinate men will go, if unduly pressed or evaded. I, too, had instances, both ancient and modern, to cite."

"General Sullivan and I," said Major Van Kuren, "were engaged in discussing the relative charms of the slender, New England spinster, and the plump, Dutch maiden of Hanmattan. General Sullivan being a military man, and of a sympathetic disposition."

"We left 'em," continued Wayne, "an hour since, to ride ahead and warn you of their approach. Likewise, to make sure that the bridge had not weakened under next spring's freshets, Colonel Reed having a great dread of drowning. But, hark ye, in good earnest; 'tis an unprecedented honor that is being done ye." He looked to see if they were properly impressed. "Never before has a mutinous brigade had a provincial president ride out to treat with 'em.

"Therefore he should be received with due respect, honor and ceremonies; so hustle out of this and parade the Line, with side arms and rifles, on the meadows. And for the love of God, wipe those grins off your silly faces! D'you think you look like desperate, obstinate mutineers with your mouths stretched like jack-o'-lanterns? A respectful but stern composure is your cue. Hark!" For the sound of a shot had seeped through the wadded windows and the flow of words. "That's the sentry at the bridge. I ordered him to fire as soon as the committee came into view, thinking it might help to settle Reed's nerve for him, as well as to inform us of their progress. Wheel out of this, now, and parade that Line; and if I hear a single huzza from any of 'em, I'll cat the lot of ye!"

"Yes, sir!" And the board wheeled out, still grinning like gargoyles, neglecting the customary salute, and leaving the door open behind them. They were in an excusable excitement.

"All's fair in love and war," remarked Wayne, crossing the room to shut out the cold, "but I'm glad the goslings were not present to observe that expedient. They have little enough respect for discipline as it is. But, gentlemen, where was young Allen?"

"By Jove, he wasn't with them at that!" exclaimed Stewart.

"Nor has Jemmy arrived, either," said Butler. "Didn't I hear you telling him to meet you here at noon, General?"

"Very likely," answered Wayne. "One tells Jemmy many things, but never with any surety that he will heed them. He's the most unreliable trustworthy man in the army. But it may be that his present absence accounts also for that of young Allen." He paused to look about him. "We may as well continue this place as headquarters," he decided. "Here are pens, paper, and sand, but the ink has been wasted. There is a bare half inch left in the bottom of the stand. Enough to serve the present turn, I reckon. But where are those —— goslings? Am I to be reduced to writing my own orders?"

"I'll act as aid," offered Stewart, seating himself at the head of the table, "vice Farquar, absent without leave. What shall I write?"

"Orders for the regimental officers to march here from Morristown," answered Wayne. " 'Twill be simpler to bring them here than to move the brigade back there, at least until after the discharging and issuing of those accursed furloughs. Heigho, three more days will see the Line thinned to a thread. But it hardly matters, if, as Jemmy vouches, the Grants will hold with us. And then to beat up more recruits! Jove, what a dog's life! Eh? And what was that?"

Stewart raised his head to listen to footsteps that crossed the ceiling above them.

"The goodwife at her feather beds," he opined.

"Faith, then," commented Wayne, "her foot is heavier than they are."

The steps wound down the stair, the little door opened, and Allen, a blotted, ink-damp paper between his fingers, stepped blindly into the room, dazzled by the light from the windows after his vigil in the dark of the loft above.

"Barstow," he said hurriedly, "here is my resignation. I give up all command. Would—would to God!—that I never had assumed it!"

"Sergeant Allen?" said Wayne; and the soldier started, as, his eyes clearing, he recognized the speaker. "You resign all command? Do I understand that you return to your duty?"

Allen's head went up defiantly, then he shrugged and came to attention.

"Yes, sir," he said quietly.

"Report to Colonel Stewart, and prepare to carry dispatches to Morristown," ordered Wayne, and, strolling to the window, he bent to peer out of it.

"Yes, sir," repeated Allen, and turned to the head of the table. He saluted the man who sat in his own late place, with an odd look of relief in his eyes. "Sergeant Fallen, sir, reporting for duty to Colonel Stewart."

Stewart returned the salute, sanded the paper he had just finished.

"You can find a good horse?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Then you should reach Morristown, with these, before midnight," said the colonel, handing Allen a sheaf of papers. "That is all—Sergeant *Allen*," he added significantly.

"Except," said Wayne, from the window, where he watched small bodies of men that were being marched on to the snow-smooth meadows, "remain yourself in Morristown until the brigade—what's left of it—returns there."

"Yes, sir," said Allen, for the fourth time, and, saluting, went to the door. There he turned and spoke in a low tone directly to Wayne. "I understand, sir—and am grateful." And, though he closed the door quickly behind him, they all saw that his face was working oddly.

"Eh?" cried Wayne, in astonishment. "'Tis nothing to be so —— upset about! And how the —— does he know, anyway? We four are the only ones who can be cognizant of it, till my report goes in to Congress. Now, what the —— *was* he getting at!" And he stopped in a brown study.

"No matter," said Stewart, tilting back in his chair, a pen between his worn teeth. "Sending him to camp will keep him out of the committee's way, and the less heard or thought of him, just for the present, the better."

Wayne nodded, and returned to his contemplation of the landscape.

"They're nearly to the bridge," he remarked.

"Then that is where Jemmy will be," said Stewart, "taking in whatever is to be seen or heard, and making grossly sincere comments on his superiors."

"Barstow—" reported Wayne "—I can tell him by the green patch on the shoulder—is heading a party to meet them. Military, by Jove! —— military! There goes the salute. Rein him, man, rein him! But not so tight, you fool! Hear the report? It came slow on this lazy air. There, Barstow has the bridle, and Reed, as usual, will exercise the better part of valor and conduct the rest of the negotiations on foot. George! I can see his knees shaking from here!—Ah, there come my goslings, but still no sign of Jemmy."

Borne sweetly on the motionless air outside came the sound of men's voices elaborately vocalizing André's quickstep.

"His horse that carried all his prog,
His military speeches,
His cornstalk whisky for his grog,
Blue stockings and brown breeches!"

The door was impudently flung open, and then slammed shut behind two who were so enamored of their own harmony that they could not bear to bring it to a close until the last lingering sweetness had been dragged from the last possible note.

"And now I've closed my epic strain,
I tremble as I show it,
Lest this same warrior-drover, Wayne,
Should ever catch the poet!"

"Eh, and if you're mad enough to wish to know what your subordinates think of you," remarked the subject of their ditty, as they still pressed the heels of their palms against their eyes, "just return to camp before your dispatch bearer gets there."

"General Wayne!" chorused the aids, more embarrassed by their blindness than by his unexpected presence. "What the ——!"

"When did you return, sir?" broke off Farquar.

"What have the honorable gentlemen agreed upon?" asked Ryan. "Will they compound the mutiny, or—"

"—or is the commander-in-chief to send on the Connecticuts? By ——, sir, if he does," swore Farquar, "I'll—I'll—well, I'll join the mutineers!"

"Yes, sir, and so will I!" declared Ryan, as hotly.

"Without doubt, that will settle the matter," said Wayne gravely. "General Washington would compound murder, rape, and felony in order to retain your invaluable services."

The sarcasm was lost on the goslings,

who were big to bursting with great news.

"Sir," Farquar, "within the last hour, the men of this command—"

"—the mutinous, insubordinate soldiery of the Pennsylvania Line, sir!" put in Ryan gloriously.

"—have given, sir, the most extraordinary exhibition of desperate, obstinate loyalty—"

"—that can be equaled—I do not say exceeded—only in the annals of antiquity! Nay, I'll go so far as to assert, that ye will not find it equaled even there!"

"Ay," agreed Farquar, "there is no tale to match it anywhere—save, maybe, in the history of Mad Anthony, himself!"

"I wont deny that I'm insane," groaned their general, "but I do protest against being called extraordinary in it. Madness seems the mode this season, if ye be the models ye conceit yourselves! Now, in one word from but one of ye—'tis enough to rattle the soundest head to hark to the two of ye at once—what has this lunatic Line been up to now?"

The aids looked at each other, and then Farquar yielded gracefully.

"You're senior, Paddy," he admitted, "and you've got the gift of tongues. Tell it well."

"Sir," said Ryan, coming to attention, and speaking as formally as one who reports a great victory to a distant general, "an hour ago this camp was invaded by emissaries of the enemy, who came to make truly magnificent offers of land and money to the men in command, if they would draw the brigade over to the British. And those men —those starving, nearly naked men, sir— promptly, proudly, and resolutely rejected those offers, and—and—and, —— it, sir, what do you think they did? Sent 'em over to the manse for us to hold for you, till you should come and punish 'em according to rule and regulation! Were you ever hearing the like, in a mob of mutinous, desperate, devil-driven—Lord, what a mess I'm making of it!"

Wayne stood regarding the generous, ardent, excited young men, his mouth curiously straightened, his eyelids drawn to mere slits.

"Well?" he said at last. "What of it? 'Twas no more than their duty. Would you, yourselves, have acted otherwise?"

"*Sir!*" gasped the outraged goslings, but he had reeled from them, slapping his thigh, and laughing like the maniac they called him.

"O God!" he cursed and prayed. "O God! —Stewart! Butler! Didst ever know anything like it? The heroes! The asses! The heroic asses! I forgive them their furloughs, for that deed! I wish that I could fill every one of their two hands with gold! King's gold! Are they not well worth all the deception I've practised, all the lies I've told, to secure them to Washington and the cause? Nay, you're right, lads—there's naught like them in the past, and the future is not likely to see their equal!"

The goslings looked a little shamefaced, for they perceived that, for a moment, they had been badly hoaxed, and that Wayne felt in the matter as they did, and as they would have him. Their embarrassment was relieved by the sounds of galloping hoofs and a man dismounting outside the door. Hurriedly Ryan turned to let in a sweaty soldier, who carried a pair of dispatch boxes.

"Ah, there you are at last, Henner!" exclaimed Wayne. "About three-quarters of an hour late—but it does not matter. Go 'round to the kitchen, and tell the goodwife that I said to fill you. Now, then, goslings, to work! Stand by your goose-quills, and prepare to issue orders by the sheaf. There's a deal of paper-work to be done, when a Line is disbanded. Here are the keys, Farquar. You'll find what's needful in the top of the larger box."

Farquar caught the keys Wayne tossed him, and opened the indicated box. It was filled with folded papers, and he picked up the topmost, spreading it wide to note its contents.

"Jupiter Ammon!"

"What is it?" asked Ryan.

"—— it, I'd forgot 'twas in that box!" muttered Wayne.

" 'Tis a draft," said the junior aid, eying the paper from another angle, as if he doubted what his eyes were seeing, "I *think* it's a draft—it *looks* like a draft—of a formal recommendation to Congress that they commission Floyd Allen—Floyd Allen!—an ensign in the Continental Armies! And—as a capsheaf!—'tis in the handwriting of Brigadier-General Anthony Wayne!"

"You're mad as—Jemmy!" ejaculated Ryan, coming around to look for himself. "For you know as well as I, that Floyd Allen is locked up the moment in the best bedroom over at the manse, waiting to be hung."

"What's that?" demanded Wayne, and

then he whistled as if suddenly enlightened on many points. "It's 'tother one! Tory Floyd! And *that* was the reason why the youngster was so infernally grateful for being sent off to Morristown!"

"Sure enough," agreed the colonels.

"But I don't understand—" puzzled Farquar.

"Posthumous honors have always struck me as those meant by 'empty' ones," said Ryan, his mind jumping, Gaelically, to the most obviously ridiculous conclusion in view.

"—*why* a British emissary should be honored by a commission in the Continental Forces," concluded Farquar, "even if you take the precaution of hanging him first. I presume it is another of your jests, sir?"

"If you two talked less, and listened to others occasionally, you'd be wiser in several ways," remarked Wayne sententiously. "Have ye not seen Jemmy, the Commodore, this morning?"

"Not until this instant," said Ryan, pointing the end of his quill at the window, against which Jemmy's nose was whitely flattened.

He was hailed inside, and ordered to enlighten the aids with a tale he had told to Wayne two days before in Philadelphia.

"To what purpose, General?" he inquired, leaning his back against the door with an assumed weariness of spirit. "If they had not been goslings, indeed, they'd have anagramized 'Loyd Fallen' long ere this."

"Oh!" said Ryan.

"Loyd Fallen?" still puzzled Farquar.

"Floyd Allen, you gander!" shouted Ryan, adding to Jemmy: "There are two of them, then?"

"Ay, two of them, indeed," nodded the Commodore. "Uncle and nephew, godfather and godson, Tory and Continental. Like as the two halves of a clam-shell in every way ye could mention. 'Obstinate as a Mohawk at the stake,' General Wayne. 'Desperate, loyal men,' both, Lieutenant Farquar, to whatever they're holding dearest. 'Classic,' Captain Ryan, classic in their ruthless, reckless valor!"

They laughed as he touched each in turn, and Wayne demanded:

"How long have you been perched under that window, anyway, Jemmy?"

"Long enough to chill the heart cords," said Jemmy, with a shivering look toward the sparkling panes. Then he went on wheedlingly: "General, ye'll never be hanging handsome, hearty Floyd Allen just for differing with yourself on a point of opinion, will ye now?"

"Come in and get warm by the fire," invited Wayne, and, when Jemmy had sidled into the ingle, and crouched down by the blaze, he promptly spread himself between the settle ends, thus blocking the Commodore in neatly, while he motioned to the aids to guard the two exits.

"Now, tell me, Jemmy," Wayne began determindedly, while Jemmy eyed him somewhat askance, "did, or did not, your handsome friend come into a Continental camp to corrupt the soldiers' loyalty, when their fortunes seemed at the lowest ebb?"

"There's no denying that," admitted Jemmy ruefully.

"Then I shall assuredly hang him," stated Wayne, "as high as the laws of war will let me! Why, one such man as he, sincere, intelligent, and of our own kind, is twice as dangerous to the Continental cause as a brigade of Clintons, and every Hessian in America! My chief regret at the moment is that I can not raise Beverly Robinson on the same gallows. And by the same token, Jemmy, I'm going to arrest and iron *you*, till after the court martial *and* execution. You're a deal too loyal to your friends!"

And when Ryan returned with a sentry, Wayne heartlessly delivered the Commodore over, with instructions for the heaviest irons procurable—"and on your lives, don't let him escape!"

"Mad, mad!" mourned Jemmy, as he was led away. "Mad as Midas, or a moose in November; mad as a holy saint in his ecstasy, or an Indian that's been bewitched! Clear the way for the Commodore, Mad Anthony's friend!"

"But even so," objected Farquar, when Jemmy had been removed, "I fail to see any logic in commissioning the leader of the mutiny. Broke is what I'd have been, if I'd committed a tenth as much!"

"Lord of Hosts!" cried Wayne. "And will ye kindly tell me what else was to be done with him? If I'd hanged him for mutinying, Colonel Stewart would have called me an unthrifty loon for wasting a good soldier, when such are like to be scarce as hen's teeth for the rest of the winter. And that's granting Colonel Butler would have permitted me to do so, the man being one of his own, to whom he much affected."

Both colonels nodded in confirmation of these assertions.

"And if I reduced him," continued Wayne, " 'tis ten to one he'd raise another mutiny about my ears; and if I didn't, who'd guarantee his future conduct? So I saw there was nothing for it but a commission to keep him quiet, occupied, and out of trouble. He'll soon have his bellyful of the authority and responsibility that he thinks he craves, and be wishing himself back in the ranks again before the bluebirds sing. I intend to send him recruiting."

Suddenly Stewart's straight mouth relaxed.

"Anthony," he chuckled, "I've heard that you're mad, but I perceive you're inspired! 'Tis a truly poetic piece of justice on the person of a mutineer, and will serve him —— well right!"

"Never mind those discharge papers, Phil," said Ryan, throwing aside his pen as he rose from the board. "There's bigger game afoot for us out yon."

"Here! Where the deuce are you off to?" demanded Wayne.

"Just to get up a little mutiny, sir," answered his aid. "I feel I'm due for another promotion, and that seems to be the quickest way of getting on in the world."

But the next mutiny ended in a far different fashion. Luck, like lightning, does not strike in the same place twice.

By the man who wrote

"The Legacy Mule" *and* "Whack-Ear's Pup"

Two Old Men

By *Alan LeMay*

A BURST of snow was flung high into the room by the screaming wind; and the miners who huddled about the stove in Canville's General Store fell silent at sight of the towering figure that set its back against the door, forcing it shut against the heavy shoulder of the gale. Even the whimpering little fellow in their midst, a boy of eleven or twelve, suddenly ceased his pleadings as he saw who the newcomer was.

The ring of miners shuffled a trifle closer to the stove, herded toward it by the breath of ice that the big man had let in. All day long the snow had sifted down over the Iron Rock Hills, covering deeply the low roofs of Canville, and swirling into great ridges on the floor of the little pocketed valley beyond. The thermometer had dropped until the mercury was little more than a ball at its base. Now, closing down with the early dark, the teeth of the storm tore at the hills in earnest.

"Looks like we'll have frost," commented the tall man, brushing the snow from his shoulders as he came forward.

One or two snickered. Cal Hopkins, oppressed by the atmosphere of disaster that was upon them all, nudged his neighbor.

"He says it looks like frost," said Cal, forcing a grin.

No one laughed. They stirred uneasily.

Crosscut Haynes, the newcomer, noted the silence, and wondered. Ordinarily a brisk fire of joking greetings would have sounded at his entrance; for he was one of the self-appointed clowns among these rock-moiling men who came in from their claims on Saturday nights to gather in the little store.

He took off his bearskin cap to shake it free of snow; in the lamplight his white thin hair lay like silver threads upon the pink of his scalp.

"Somebody daid?" he demanded.

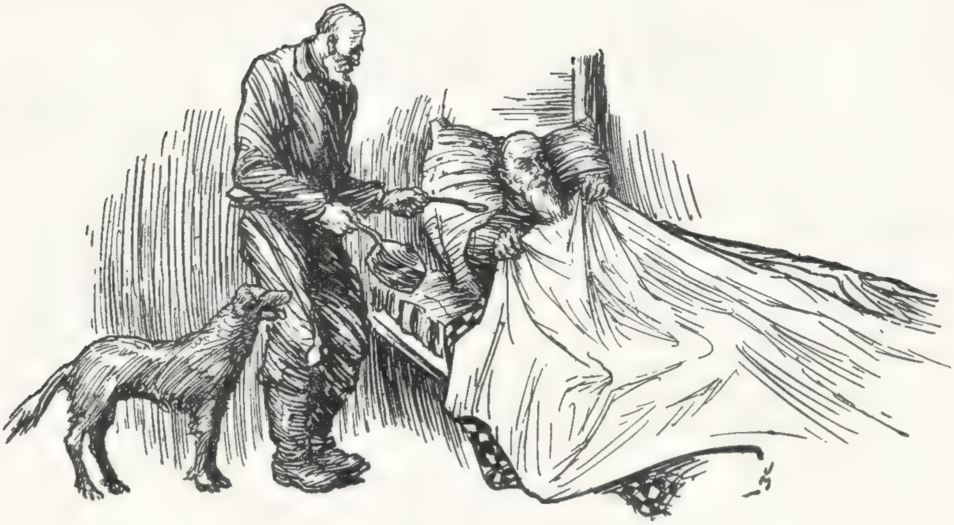
No one answered him. In big, slow strides he drew near the stove, shaking back the collar of his sheepskin coat. His sharp old black eyes flicked about the circle as his fingers worked needles of silver ice out of a beard that was silver, too. Then for a long time there was silence about that stove, where usually there were jokes, and horseplay, and shouts of laughter.

In a dark rear corner the owlish storekeeper was showing shoddy blankets to two men like bears. The three turned to look at Crosscut, and their voices dropped to buzzing mumbles.

"What'll he say when he finds out?" wondered one.

"Prob'ly say it serves the old sneak-thief right—good riddance!" growled another.

"You'd never think," said the storekeeper, "that Crosscut an' One-Eye Alf was partners fer purty near eight years, both of 'em swearin' by the other. An' now this



past year, split up, never speakin'; an' each one ready to tell yuh that the other is the lowest, meanest, sneakin'est rattlesnake that ever—"

"I never seen fellers so turrible bitter at each other," corroborated one of the black-bearded men.

"That's the way it goes," rumbled the other miner; "there ain't no such hate any place as the way two partners hate each other, once they split. An' the longer they was together, the more they can hate."

"One-Eye started it," said the storekeeper. "He shouldn't never have chucked that 'tater into Crosscut's mouth when Crosscut was laughin'."

"'Twas only a joke," one miner defended. "Didn't mean Crosscut had to go to court an' git One-Eye declared loony an' incompetent, like he done. They was always jokin'."

"Well, Crosscut was only jokin' too. One-Eye shouldn't o' had Crosscut throwed off their claim that they staked together; it belonged to both of 'em, never mind what the records happened to show. You know an' I know, they staked that claim together."

"I been scared sometimes there'd be a murder, one way or the other," the storekeeper offered. "When fellers get to broodin' like that—"

"Some say," said a miner, leaning over the counter, "One-Eye has struck on that claim they used to have together!"

"I know darn well he has," the storekeeper said darkly. "The stuff that he's payin' his bills with ain't the same as they used to get. But he's been hangin' on to it, jest the same. Too miserable mean an miserly to—"

"Chuh, chuh!" the miner deprecated. "You best be rememberin' somethin'. Talkin' like that about a dead man ain't such a big idee. First you know, you'll be hearin' his ha'nt, moanin' round the store on nights when the boys has gone home—"

They let it drop; yet they were loath to rejoin the strained group at the stove.

A change had come upon the crowded stove-circle, precipitated by Cal Hopkins. Cal had endured the silence as long as he was able.

"One-Eye Alf is dyin'," he blurted out suddenly.

All eyes turned to Crosscut; the men looked like terriers peering up at an old greyhound, so much did the old man tower over the rest. They saw Crosscut's pink and silver face blacken at the mention of his former partner's name; the wrinkles pinched close about his eyes as the dark pupils bored into the speaker.

Cal Hopkins floundered on.

"He's up there in his cabin, without no wood, nor nothin' to eat, sick an' freezin'; dyin' by inches he is."

Crosscut said nothing. Outside the little lamplit store the gale screamed with the tortured ghost voices of ten thousand bygone braves, and an undertone in monstrous bass zoomed perpetually, as if the mountains themselves were groaning out their souls. It was too much for Cal Hopkins. He must hear a human voice, if only his own.

"Anyway, that's what everybody's sayin', an' I reckon it's so, all right. 'Hoopity' Bill says he was ailin' first o' the week, an' Sam Hawk says they wasn't no smoke out o' his chimly this mornin', though he thought nothin' of it at the time; an ever'body has it that he's dyin', all right. But what with this storm, they ain't nobody can go to help him out. Cy Haskins got lost this evenin', not fifty yards from this door; an' we only found him accidentally, mos' froze—an' there lays pore One-Eye dyin' without help, an'—"

Cal's voice trailed off, pinned to earth by those impaling sharp eyes. Everybody was looking at Crosscut; everybody but Cal Hopkins, who shifted and shuffled, his eyes roving. When Crosscut spoke, his voice rang out hard, horrible with his hate.

"Well, an' why not?" he demanded.

Towering gauntly over them, with his white beard and his bitter, cold-lighted eyes, he looked like an avenging prophet, harsh and cruel as the spirit of the hills in which he dug. He spoke one more sentence, low and savage, the words like clenched fists.

"It's a jedgment o' God!"

In the silence the little boy blubbered convulsively, and Crosscut's dour gaze turned on him. Curiously, the boy's eyes met the old man's fiercely; and it was Crosscut's gaze that flickered and turned away. The old man wheeled his wide shoulders away from the sodden group about the stove, and walked back to the shadowy corner where the storekeeper still fumbled among the piles of blankets.

"Who's boy is that?"

The storekeeper assumed an air of detached innocence before he answered. He wanted none of Crosscut's wrath falling upon him.

"That's One-Eye's nevvy," he told the old man. "He ain't got no other folks. He's been with One-Eye about six months. One-Eye sent him down fer grub the first o' the week, but told him to stay down if it snowed, not to try to git back. One-Eye said he'd come down hisself if it snowed, an' the two of 'em would stop in town. An' since then it's thickened, an' the boy can't git back."

Crosscut stalked back to the stove. He'd heard of One-Eye's nephew.

Time passed; none made move to leave. They were glad to bask in the warmth of the storekeeper's fire, conserving their own hard won wood. None, in any case, would attempt a journey of more than a few rods on such a night. They would bed down here, on the counters, on the floor.

The boy came out of his silence, begging some one to attempt the dash with him, eight miles to One-Eye's cabin in the hills. The pockets of his small sheepskin coat were full of bacon, flour, and quinine. The miners related that the boy had twice started by himself; but they had caught him and dragged him back.

The youngster was importuning Sol Westbrook now.

"Aw, Sol, we kin make it! Sol, you ain't goin' to give in that easy, be yuh, Sol? Come on, Sol! He's dyin', he is—"

"Once an' fer all, sonny," Sol boomed, "I tell yuh it ain't in reason. We couldn't git there noway—we'd only git lost before we got a good start."

Then, more kindly, as the boy burst into tears—

"I'd be the first to go, sonny, was there any chance. But there ain't. Nothin' kin live in that storm."

Crosscut spoke unexpectedly.

"Whatcha want to lie to the boy fer?"

"Whose lyin'?"

"You be!"

"You mean to stand there an' tell me a man could git through that—"

"This here li'l snow flurry? Heck, yes! A *man* could."

The miners looked at each other.

"See?" whimpered the boy. "See? Even he says—"

"Pay no 'tention," said Sol. "That's jest his big talk."

But the boy was unquieted. His perpetual blubbering made it miserable for them all.

"Now look what yuh done," said one fiercely to Crosscut. "Got the boy all het up!"

Crosscut snorted, and mumbled something about old ladies. Then all stared in astonishment as he stooped from his unusual height to whisper to the boy, his arm about the small shaking shoulders. When he stood up again the boy had quieted.

"You make me sick," Crosscut told them. "I'm goin' home."

Unhurriedly he got a small sack of oatmeal, a chunk of bacon, and a bottle of some dark medicine for man or beast from the shelves of the store. He showed his purchases to the storekeeper, and wedged them into his pockets.

"I'm borryin' yore snowshoes," he remarked. Then, to the others, "Don't none o' yuh git too far from that stove. An' be right shore to keep hold of each other's coat tails, too. It's a middlin' tough night —fer softies."

"You can't make them three miles to yore shanty," Sol protested. "Don't be a dang old fool. You was lucky to git across the road from the saloon! Them three miles is as good as a million, what with—"

"Blah!" roared Crosscut.

When the door had closed after the old man there was silence again. The foot-deep windrow of hard, dry snow continued to grow before the crack under the door, forming a graceful, crescent-shaped ridge whose beauty no one saw.

AS CROSSCUT stepped out of the store the full force of the storm caught him with such buffeting strength that he staggered. Then, after a moment, he gained his footing; and bending low, lunged forward into the teeth of the gale.

The cruel, killing cold of the racing air tore through sheep's wool and muffler, snatching the breath out of his lips. His old eyes pinched shut with a sudden wince, as if the eyeballs had been struck by a switch.

He did not put on the snowshoes now. The snow was knee-deep, but feathery. As long as it was possible for him to fight through it at all he could do better without the webs, for he was not a deep-snow man.

His shoe packs were soft and rubbery of sole; even through his heavy layers of socks his feet could feel the muffled contour of the ground as they struck down through the snow. The feel of the ground was one of his two ways of keeping his direction; the other way the wind provided. If the wind should twist, and he should lose the trail by even a few yards, nothing but luck could save him. No landmark was visible in that black blinding storm. A mouse at midnight in the middle of a sack of flour would have been so blinded.

He struggled northward, his feet groping for the wagon rut that told the way. Two miles of that fight against the wind, and he must turn off. There was a tree down across the trail close to the point where he must turn; he had noticed it that morning on the way in, for the trail from his own cabin dropped into the same wagon track farther north. If no one passing since morning had moved that tree, he had a chance of finding the way he had traveled so often before, the way to the claim where the partners had once lived in peace.

Every step was a battle; he must heave into that battering wind as strongly as if he were rolling a great stone. A drift barred his way, a vast dune of snow swept up from miles of prairie scoured by the gale. He could not see it, but plunged deeper and deeper into the drift, still feeling for the rut that showed his feet the way. He was floundering to his shoulders before he gave up and unslung the snowshoes from his back.

A piteous wailing cry, thin and eery through the shriek of the blast, sounded behind the old man, and his hair raised. For a moment a superstitious panic clutched his throat as he thought that a wild voice had called his name. He shook his head grimly to fight off the illusion, and started on.

Once more, faint in the wind, but shrill with desperation, the screaming cry sounded behind; and this time the big man turned back.

Retracing his steps, he suddenly stumbled directly over a small struggling figure, and fell heavily, thrown down by the wind. When he had untangled the snowshoes and floundered to his feet, One-Eye's nephew was clinging to his arm.

The old man cursed savagely.

"Whatcha follerin' me for?"

The wind snatched the reply from the boy's mouth, but Crosscut gathered something about—

"Could 'a' made it—darn deep snow—"

They had come too far to turn back now. Still cursing, but questioning no more, Crosscut dragged the boy on to his shoulders, steadied himself upon his snowshoes, and struggled on.

When he was past the drift and could proceed without the snow webs again, he put the boy down. In the shallower snow he could drag the boy along by the wrist; he was less trouble that way. Yet, throughout the night's long journey the boy remained a handicapping burden, an unfair drag upon energies pitted against odds already unjustly great.

It was hard to find the wagon track again when he had crossed the drift; but, after a long search, his feet discovered it at last.

The chill began to bite through the sheepskin, through the layers of wool, through the tough old hide that was his last defense. His fingers numbed, and his feet began to lose their sense of feel. Ice was forming where his laboring breath struck his mustache; tears, laced out by the wind, froze as they reached his lashes, till he must wink hard to keep his eyes from freezing shut.

A long time passed, an hour, more than an hour—two or three, perhaps. He still stumbled in the wagon rut, but the tree that was to tell him where to turn did not appear. It must be gone, or he would have reached it before now. They were done for, if that were true. But there was no other place he knew of to turn off, no place to stop. On, on, without thought of turning back, on—

He stumbled headlong into the fallen tree. A broken branch stabbed into his face, and he went down. It was a relief to fall, to be released for a moment from that terrible battle with the wind. For a moment he lay unresisting in the snow; then he lashed himself up, and, dragging the boy after him, found the turn of the trail, went on.

There was no wagon track to guide him any more now that he had turned west. But he could hardly get lost, for the trail led up a cañon; and where the cañon flattened out, the way was hedged in by tangled brush. The wind was less in the cañon. It twisted and swirled, biting deep, attacking on one side then another, swaying the struggling man; but he didn't have to buck its full force any more.

He must use the snowshoes most of the time now, for the ice of the stream was buried deep. He hated those thong-webbed frames. Before he had gone two hundred yards with them the muscles along his shin bones began to ache from the strain of repeatedly lifting the toes of the heavy shoes. His feet were senseless, and his breathing seared his windpipe, scoured raw by the cold.

Worst of all, where the snow was deep he must carry the boy on his shoulders, a burden that would have been light to him once, but now crushed down heavily upon him, more heavily with every stride. What agonies the youngster was suffering he could not know; he only knew that the boy was conscious, and still able to keep his feet part of the time over the places where Crosscut could put him down.

Over and over the old man fell with those clumsy, unaccustomed snowshoes under the boy's burdening weight; but he rose stumbling, and floundered on. Six miles to go.

"Not yet, Old Master," he groaned. "Not yet—"

On and on endlessly through the storm. It seemed that the night must be almost done. His hands were hardening into useless claws; his feet were dull bludgeons from which even the pain had drawn away. The cold was getting into the upper joints of his legs; his dangling forearms went into a strange trembling palsy with the weariness of his whole frame. An ominous, aching pain in his left upper arm told of the overburdened labors of his heart.

He must be nearly there! Then—a sentinel rock into which he stumbled told him that he had come a mile.

On, on, on, while the pines screamed to the agonizing lash of the cold, and the mountains moaned with the voices of lost worlds—

MIDNIGHT, or past. The red glow from the cracks of the stove lost radiance, leaving the corners of the tiny cabin dark. Then the glow crept homeward to the firepot a little more rapidly, receding from the cold, until it no longer touched the walls, nor the high-piled blankets of the sleeping man; and at last even the curled-up shaggy dog was lost in the dark, and the stove cracks themselves were only little marks in the darkness, traced with red ink.

Once an hour or thereabouts the dog had howled mournfully, rousing One-Eye Alf out of the bunk. The man was glad, in a way, to have him do this; it woke him in time to rebuild the fire, the little busy fire that staved off the misery of the cold.

Now the dog woke again, but not to howl this time. Instead he rose tensely to his feet, and the raised roach of his shoulder shag blotted out those dimming red stove cracks. For a moment he listened, sorting some trivial sound out of the organ swells of the wind. Then suddenly he burst into savage barking, and sprang against the door.

The pile of blankets in the bunk stirred, and One-Eye dragged himself out, fully dressed.

"Take it slower, Belshazzer," he comforted the dog. "Leave the varmints snuff, if they want. Ain't hurtin' nothin'."

The shaggy dog nuzzled One-Eye's hand, and peered up through the dark at the wizened old face; then he stood watching the door, and growling deeply in his chest. One-Eye dropped an armful of wood in front of the stove; the cold sticks rang together with high, tinkling protests, like xylophone bars. The red light of the embers touched the lank, iron-gray strands of hair that lay over his baldness, and warmed his pinched old features, as he opened the stove.

Once more the dog flung himself at the slab door, this time keening in a high, shrill whine.

"Now, Belshazzer, you let be!"

But the dog was not to be denied. He glued his nose for a moment to the crack of the jamb, then yelped and tore at the door with his claws.

"All right," One-Eye conceded. "Go chase 'em. I wanta set up fer a smoke, anyway."

He set his shoulder to the door to prevent the wind from flinging it wide, and slowly eased it open a few inches.

"Bar-r-room-m-m!" howled the blast, whisking half a bushel of snow into the room.

"'Tain't a barroom," said One-Eye. "Stay out, wind! Belshazzer, you—"

Something rammed the door with the force of a driving log, hurling One-Eye backward, flinging the slab door wide. Black against the dance of the snow a great figure loomed, grotesquely misshapen by reason of the burden upon its back. It lurched, reeled, caught its balance, and for a moment stood unsteadily. Then it bowed its snow-shaggy head low to come into the door, came into the room in slow dragging strides, one foot after the other, one foot after the other—

Blinded, it seemed, but with the surety of long habit, Crosscut staggered across the cabin to the bunk that had once been his, and slowly laid his burden upon a pile of junk therein. The bundle squirmed, whimpered and lay still. Then Crosscut swayed, put his hands against the log wall; and stood there, head bowed, trying perhaps to gather what remained of his strength to shut the door.

The shaggy excited dog whined joyously, leaping upon the man over and over, trying to reach the man's face with his wet tongue. Perhaps Crosscut knew the dog was there, and was strengthened by the greeting. But of One-Eye's presence he was not yet aware.

Then—

"What you doin' here?" One-Eye's voice rasped harshly.

With a lurching swing as sudden as if he had been struck with a whip, Crosscut turned to face his enemy, the man that had been his partner once. He stood there blinking dazedly, an unsteady, storm-broken old man, for all his great size.

The fresh pine sticks in the stove were blazing up now, sending bright surges of flickering orange light from the stove's open door. Crosscut could see One-Eye well enough in that light; the familiar, wizened little figure with its few lank strands of gray hair brushed over the bald head, its iron gray mustache, its pinched features, stood out sharply, orange against the darkness behind.

One-Eye, standing there perfectly healthy, perfectly well-fed, clothed, and warmed by a crackling fire—it took a little time for Crosscut to comprehend all that.

Then the blinking daze went out of Crosscut's face, and the sag left his great, gaunt frame. It was as if the shreds of his sanity were in that moment whisked away into the storm, such a mad, crazy light came into his wind-whipped eyes as he towered over that other old man. The ice-fringed lips drew back over the snags of teeth in a crazed laughing snarl.

God knows what terrible denunciation would have torn its way out of that wide snarling mouth, had words been possible to the frost seared throat. But only a horrible, quavering, husky noise came out, like a long gasp, or the throat hiss of a cimarron.

For just a moment they stood that way, as if that towering crazy figure were going to fling itself upon the other man. And the whimpering dog, his tail hugged to his belly now, ran on cowering legs between them in foolish figure eights, like a trapped rat. Then the boy Crosscut had laid in the bunk screamed thinly at the sight of the mad man's face.

Crosscut—and this is what they never tired of telling at Canville's General Store, until the store itself gave up the ghost, many years ago. They related it over and over again, these men of the Western hills, as they grew old; laughingly, sometimes, but with a certain undercurrent of awe, a certain wonderment at the hardihood, the brave madness that is possible to men—

Crosscut slowly turned, tottering, and steadied himself for a moment against the sides of the door; and once more the great shoulders brushed the door jambs as he stood there. Then, dragging with his terrible weariness, but unhesitatingly nonetheless, Crosscut stepped out into the bitter snow. The old man who had come eight ghastly miles to aid his enemy would still not take shelter under his enemy's roof, if there were no need for him there.

Perhaps the old head would have raised, but there was no strength left in the man for that. One foot after the other; one foot—the other— He disappeared into the storm. Eight miles back to town; seven to the nearest shanty, his own!

The door slammed behind him, and the bar fell.

Within, the boy came stumbling, white-faced, out of the bunk where Crosscut had put him down.

"Stop him!" begged the boy. "He'll die out thar! Git him back!"

"I will like ——!" One-Eye grated. "D'yuh want our throats cut?"

"Listen, listen!" the boy gibbered. "We heard down at the town that you was dyin', an' freezin' to death without any wood. An' he was the only one that dast buck the storm t' help yuh!"

It took a moment or two for that to sink in. Then, with a peculiar expression on his pinched old face, One-Eye flung open the door and dashed out into the blizzard.

One-Eye had not far to search. The blaze still sent its wavering orange light from the stove's open door. Twenty strides down the trail the light from the door made visible—just barely visible—a fallen tower that the snow was already covering up.

"MISER," croaked the voice within the silver beard. "Rotten old scum! Yuh knowed the claim was rich when yuh lawed me off o' my half of it! Me, that had sweat an' dug alongside o' yuh, tryin' t' bring 'er in!"

Crosscut, too weak to raise himself from the warm bunk to which One-Eye had dragged him, was striking out at his enemy still.

"I never!" denied One-Eye violently. "I never knowed the claim was goin' to bring in more'n the us'al fifty cents a day. I was jest lawin' back at yuh fer lawin' at me, an' gittin' me declar'd incompetent, an' dodderin'!"

"Miser!" croaked Crosscut's bitter voice again, ignoring One-Eye's reply. "Miser, miser! Too miserable mean t'enjoy the gold when yuh got it. Too stinkin' tight to use yore half, let alone my half that yuh cheated me out o'! It's fittin'!"

A gasp of dry laughter from behind the silver beard drove the gibes home.

Tiny points of sweat were pricked out upon One-Eye's forehead by the light of the guttering candle. His voice was ragged and pleading.

"Fer God's sake, Crosscut, it ain't so! I been savin' the strike, an' only usin' what I had to t' live, waitin' till I could git yuh to come back. But you'd never come half way, nor gimme a chance t' speak. Half the claim's yores, Crosscut, an' always has been. An' if you'll look in the recorder's office, you'll find yore deed an' title to half filed thar, whar I filed it soon's I found the claim was any good!"

Crosscut made no reply.

"We're rich, Crosscut! An' it's high time fer us to leave off all this foolishness an' git to work!"

"Blah!" said Crosscut.

He turned his face to the wall, and immediately became impervious to One-Eye's further remarks.

It was daylight when Crosscut awoke; the first thing he saw was the face of his enemy, who was bending over him with a pan of oatmeal.

"Miser," said the old man in the bunk, apparently taking up his speech where he had left off the night before. "Rotten old—"

"Scum," said One-Eye unexpectedly. "I heard yuh the first time. You shore are tiresome."

Crosscut stared upward, temporarily

silenced. One-Eye pulled him upward by a handful of shirt front, and roughly shoved a folded blanket under his head.

A feeble "Hey," was the only comment that Crosscut could call to mind.

"Here's yore oats," One-Eye said.

The other old man rallied enough to shake a crooked finger under One-Eye's nose.

"Yuh cheated me out o' my half o' this claim!" he contended fiercely.

"I done so," One Eye-agreed. "If you'd had anythin' else, I'd 'a' cheated yuh out o' that, too. But yuh didn't. I got it all first scoop."

Crosscut, expecting denials, was taken aback; so much so that he absently accepted the proffered gruel.

"Yuh knew this claim was rich!" he said presently.

"Natcherly," said One-Eye. "Why'd I cheat yuh out of it, if 'twasn't any good?"

Crosscut ate his oatmeal in dazed silence; but by the time the gruel was finished, and One-Eye brought a cup of coffee, Crosscut was ready for him again.

"Yo're a lunatic!" he spat out. "Nothin' but a loony feller—I proved it in the courts!"

"Uh-huh," One-Eye conceded without affront.

"Nothin' but a common lunatic," Crosscut amplified.

"An' yo're the feller," said One-Eye, "that this here common lunatic outsmarted."

The giant frame under the blankets stirred angrily.

"I made yuh sorry," Crosscut fumed, reverting to the beginning of their legal quarrels, "I made yuh sorry that yuh flung that 'tater in my mouth when I was laughin'! First thing I said, when I got that 'tater out o' my mouth, I said, 'I'll git yuh declared loony fer this!' An' I done so! I made yuh wish you'd never see that 'tater—"

"That 'tater was a mis-slip," One-Eye admitted.

The beginning of a gloating grin appeared beneath Crosscut's whiskers, but disappeared as One-Eye went on.

"The store cat was settin' right alongside that 'tater, on the counter," the wizened little man explained. "When I see that two-bushel cackle comin' on yuh, an' yore mouth opened up like a sidehill shaft, I reached an' got the 'tater accidental. Mistake. I aimed to fling in the cat."

Crosscut was stumped again.

"When I get up off here," he promised at last in a steam of rage, "I'm goin' to kill you with my bar' hands!"

"I'll lay out some knives an' clubs an' things fer yuh," One-Eye told him. "Lunatics is purty tough killin'. An' yuh better do yore darndest right at the first off, because soon's I've give yuh a reasonable chance I'm goin' to kick yuh out o' here!"

Crosscut, exhausted, once more turned his face to the wall.

When One-Eye next shook Crosscut awake the daylight had vanished, and it was the guttering candle, shorter now, that gave the cabin a little quavering light.

"Whar's my oats?" Crosscut demanded immediately.

One-Eye shoved the warm pan into his hands.

"Yore lookin' purty strong, now," he told the old man in the bunk. "Guess it's 'bout time you was startin' back to town."

Crosscut's voice raised to a gusty shout. "Ain't startin' no place!"

The other old man concealed a gleam of humor. He knew there was no danger when Crosscut started shouting. When he was slit-eyed and low-voiced—that was another matter.

"Oh, yuh ain't, huh?" One-Eye replied. "Wall, I aim tuh—"

From the bunk came a hearty bellow.

"This yar place is jest as much mine as 'tis yorn!" Crosscut roared. "I'll stay jest as long as I want!"

The watching dog by the stove relaxed, and blew out his breath happily as he let his head thump to the floor. And One-Eye's face was contented as he turned away.

Both knew definitely, now, that the two old men were back on a partnership basis at last.

An author
new to our pages

Charles Gilson in MANDARIN

CHAPTER I

JEN-TE

WHEN the bark *Concepcion,* out of Valparaiso, dropped her anchors in the harbor of Hongkong one sultry, steaming morning in the seventies, her dago crew was on the verge of mutiny, she was foul with barnacles, her salt pork and *ling* fish were putrid, her ship's biscuits moldy, and she smelt like a badger's burrow.

There was on board but one white man, in the more fastidious meaning of the term, who was resolved that he had seen the last of her. For he was not of the kind that was intended, either by Providence or Nature, to live for months on stale water and the coarsest food, and to listen to incessant, sinful talk in a sweating, breathless forecastle.

Yet, all these things had Mark Hebden done, because he was cursed with an undue sense of the romantic, the desire of a ne'er-do-well to see as much of the world as he could, and because he would rather trust his life to wind and weather and the little gods of Chance than follow his father's calling as a watchmaker in Sacramento.

He had wandered south to Panama, and thence to Chili. And because he had read of the South Seas, and believed that thereabouts a man might dream his days away with a copy of Shakespeare's sonnets, to the accompaniment of surf-waves and the rustling of feathery palms, he had signed on as one of the crew of the *Concepcion.*

But he had done with that floating madhouse when he first set eyes upon Hongkong, where the round-faced, cherubical Ah Li sat on a stone bench upon the *praya,*

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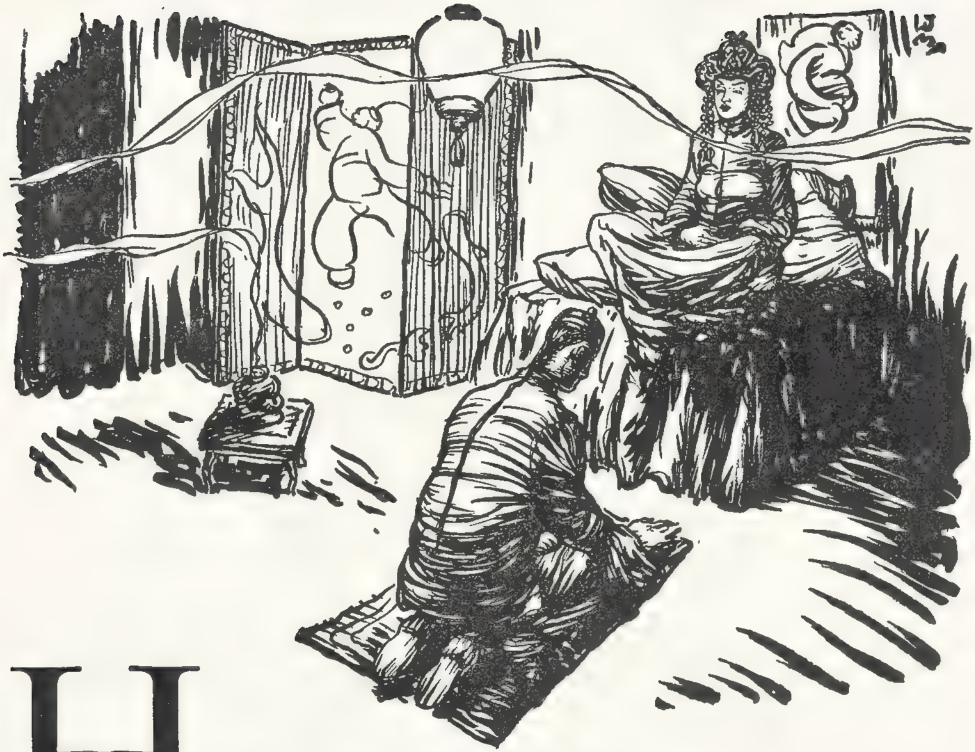
* *"Mandarin Honor," copyright, 1926, by Charles Gilson.*



HONOR

in contemplation of the Analects of Kong-fu-tsze—who was Confucius.

Ah Li was a merchant who traded in silks, who with the help of a coolie plied his own *wupan*, or river-junk, between Canton and the ports of Hongkong and Macao. Priding himself on his knowledge of pidgin English, he welcomed the approach of the "stranger from afar."

Innumerable *sampans* lay clustered along the shore, so close together that with their matting awnings they resembled so many bottles packed in straw. The half-naked boatmen laughed, shouted and cursed, in a language the richest in the world in swear-words; while coolies, *compradores*, *shroffs* and fishermen jostled and joked, haggled and argued, with all the virility of China—where nothing is wasted save energy and words.

Away out across the harbor lay Stonecutter's Island, like a phantom ship in the haze that danced in the heat, and beyond, upon the mainland, the vague, blue hills above Kowlun.

And Mark Hebden stepped ashore, thirsting for what he called experience; and the Orient claimed him from that day forth. For as he walked with Ah Li in the evening in the crowded streets of Chinatown, where the gilded signboards creak and swing, he fell under the spell of the East. China swallowed him up.

He had dreamed of a land of flowers and idleness; of sweet, wondrous nights, and the round, pale China moon; of gaily-painted lanterns and shrill Chinese song. He knew nothing then of the sins and the smells, of the wet heat and the flies; but, when he had once seen the olive, oval face of the fair Jen-te, and looked into her soft, dark, almond eyes, he no longer wished to remember that he had ever been a white man.

The worthy Ah Li attached himself to Mark, to do him justice, not solely for gain. Though they belonged to civilizations diametrically opposite, and their talk was at first confined to pidgin English, they had some mysterious human touch in common, and soon became fast friends.

Hebden found in the round-faced Cantonese much that was comical and more that was instructive. As for Ah Li, Yen Wang alone, the Devil-god, knows what he found in Mark!

They journeyed to Canton; and in those stifling, narrow streets Hebden marveled at the vitality, the industry, the abounding cheerfulness of a people who openly held him in contempt. He hated them for their want of sympathy and insincerity, as he hated the fetid atmosphere he had to breathe and the vile food he was compelled to eat in native restaurants and inns. Better even the reeking foredeck of the *Concepcion* than those squalid, narrow streets, choked by day, flaming by night; than noise interminate, sickening smells; life without immunity, reason or prospects, wherein nothing seemed to thrive, save cruelty and corruption.

But he gained what he had wanted—experience. In time he learned to think as the Chinese think, something of their strangely contorted philosophy and to speak the Cantonese dialect as well as any white man can ever hope to. But he would never have accomplished all this and what is to follow, had it not been for Jen-te.

The world of Jen-te was the world of the dreamer. Beyond the clustered shipping, the river-junks and *sampans*, one came upon the painted flower-boat lanterns, swaying in the breeze upon the river.

Mark saw her first through a creeper-clad trellis-work partition, seated before a blackwood table; and through the flowers beyond her there were glimpses of dark moving water and the lights of passing boats.

Frail, mysterious and slender, she was like a painting upon rice-paper. And from that day forth Mark Hebden was a lost man—lost to the land of his heritage and birth. The poet and the fool in him listened to her singing and the crooning of the water under the bows of the flower-boat where she lived. It was nothing to him that Song Wu, her father, was the owner of this flower-decked, floating tea-house, or that she was already betrothed—for so it may be called—to the mandarin, Ying Taotai, the magistrate of Tong-chau; Mark, who was a fool, thought that in her he had found the salvation of his soul, the ultimate reason of his life.

He caught a glimpse of Ying one evening in the tea-house—a fat, oily man with many chins who smoked and smiled and nodded, who had little eyes like a pig and a roll of fat in the nape of his neck. He breathed heavily, and curled his short legs under him on Song Wu's cushioned divan where, dressed in a mandarin's summer robe of embroidered Chifu silk, and wearing the Red Button of a Mandarin of the First Degree, he lay like a sow in straw.

Ying Taotai had a right to, and could most certainly afford, as many wives as he wanted; but Jen-te, though not emancipated, had seen enough of foreign life upon the flower-boats on the river to know that she had a mind of her own. She thought the mandarin unutterably repulsive, whereas Mark had found favor in her almond eyes.

For Mark had spoken to Jen-te, with her squeezed feet, her penciled eyebrows and enameled cheeks. To her he was a giant and wonderful, the hero of a legend. And so she stole away with him at dead of night through the crowded junks, away from the great city of a thousand wonders.

In Ah Li's *wupan* they dropped down the river, passing—as dawn flooded the sky with amber and soft ruby tints—the tragic tower from which for centuries innocent, useless little girl-babies had been hurled to death.

And Jen-te drew close to Mark. Such might have been her own fate, had not Song Wu had the wherewithal to keep her—an unwanted woman, in a pitiless and thrifty land.

She had found a protector who was both kind and strong, and who would marry her in accordance with the doctrines of his own strange gods, when they had found a refuge in the island of Macao.

But it was difficult for her to realize that she was no longer the property of her father, when she found that the only wedding guest was the amiable Ah Li, who brought an offering of larks' tongues, and then went back in his *wupan* to the city of Canton.

Macao is only half Chinese. The other

half is Portuguese. And the admixture of these two races is to be found in an old, white town upon a sun-scorched hill, where no one does any work, where life hangs upon the shining *copper-cash* of the *fan-tan* table and the ivory opium-pipe.

Here Mark Hebden lived his own life in his own way; and he and Jen-te were happy. They saw Ah Li often; for never did the round-faced Cantonese sail his *wupan* into Macao harbor without paying a visit to his friend. Though Mark often yearned for the companionship of his own countrymen, men to whom he could talk of the things he had always cherished, at the end of a year of native life, he had no great cause to be dissatisfied. Jen-te, though eighteen years of age, had the mind of a child. They would sit together at the lattice window that overlooked the harbor, and watch the shipping in the mouth of the Pearl River, waiting for the *wupan* of Ah Li—who was the only friend they had. By then Mark had grown a pigtail, and to all outward and visible appearances had himself become Chinese.

They were sitting one night together at the window, long after dark, when the stars were mirrored on the sea that was smooth as glass, when Ah Li's *wupan*, propelled by the great oar at the stern, swung out of the darkness and hove to under the wall of the house that stood upon the water's edge.

They had some reason to suspect that something was amiss; and Jen-te gave vent to an exclamation of alarm. The old Cantonese had not greeted them from a distance with his usual shout of welcome; and beside, it was his custom to tie up his craft at a bamboo jetty, a hundred yards away or so, and to enter the house from the street, as a visitor should. But now, he stood up in his *wupan*, and placing both hands to his mouth, spoke in a strained and anxious whisper.

"Lower a rope," said he. "It is not safe that I should be seen in the town."

Mark did as he was asked, making fast the end of the rope to an iron bar in the center of the window. And there he left it, even after Ah Li had climbed up, to sit cross-legged on the floor with the guest-cup of green tea untouched before him.

"You are in danger, my friend," said he.

Hebden was already Chinese enough to show no surprize, though Jen-te clutched his arm.

"How do you know that, Ah Li?" he asked.

"Because I have eyes," said the other. "Three days ago, I saw the Macao boat leave the island of Shamien in Canton. As usual there were many passengers on board. And one of these was Ying Taotai."

"And how does that concern myself?" Mark queried.

"What business but foul play," Ah Li demanded, in a voice devoid of all expression, "can have brought hither the Taotai of Tong-chau?"

Hebden made a movement as if about to rise to his feet.

"Do you mean Jen-te?" he asked.

The Cantonese nodded.

"The Taotai has been in Macao for two days," said he. "He has money enough to hire as many men as he likes to do his bidding. All the way from Canton I have feared for your safety. The blow may fall at any moment."

"If any wrong is done me," said Mark, "I can seek redress from the governor of the island."

Ah Li shrugged his shoulders, opened his fan, and fanned himself.

"The Taotai will care nothing for that," he answered. "Do not imagine that either the Portuguese Government or the Tsung-li Yamen in Pekin will take the matter seriously. In China, girls are of no more account than the frogs that croak in the paddy-fields."

Mark may have been a dreamer and a fool, but he knew enough of China to realize the gravity of the situation. Moreover, if what Ah Li had said were true, there was not a moment to lose.

"You must take Jen-te away with you tonight," said he. "By means of the rope we can lower her into the *wupan*, and no one will see her leave the house, which even now may be watched."

"Is sure to be watched," said Ah Li, raising the guest-cup to his lips—a ceremonious suggestion that he was about to take his leave.

"Where can we hide her," Hebden asked, "until after the trouble is over?"

"In Heung Shan across the bay," the Cantonese replied, "my coolie has a little house, where he keeps his fishing-tackle and nets. It is not very comfortable, but she will be safe; for they will never think of looking there."

At that very moment, there came a violent banging on the street door, which fortunately for them was bolted. There was an empty room below that at one time had been a shop, in which the noise was echoed like a cannonade.

Then they could hear voices in the street without, and someone who was struggling to force open the door.

Jen-te could not run because of her squeezed feet; but she hobbled as fast as she could to the staircase.

"My master, they are here!" she cried. "Lord of my life, what are we to do?"

"Gather together all that you possess. Wrap up everything in a sheet, and give it to Ah Li. Leave no sign that you have ever been here, and then blow out the lamp. You will be safe with Ah Li, until I can join you."

There was no time for further talk. He must leave her.

He descended the stairs quickly and cautiously, cursing his luck that he had no better weapon with which to defend himself than his bare fists.

In the dark room upon the ground floor, he waited in suspense. He knew that it would take Jen-te at least ten minutes to prepare for her departure; and there was every chance that the slight woodwork of the door would not withstand the attack for as long as that.

The blade of a knife transfixed a panel and split it from top to bottom; and a shaft of light from a hanging street-lamp over the way stabbed into the room.

Mark struck blindly through the opening; and on the instant his clenched fist was seized, and two rows of teeth fastened themselves into the flesh of his forearm. The pain he suffered compelled him to throw all his weight backward and to free his arm, as a knife flashed past his face.

Groping on the floor, he found the knife; and armed with this, he hurried up the staircase to the upper room.

Ah Li had already lowered Jen-te into the *wupan*, and was about to shove off.

"Come, too, my lord!" she cried to him.

"If I did, they would but follow us," he answered. "I remain here to keep them off, until you are out of sight."

He severed the rope and threw it down into the *wupan*, thus cutting off his only line of retreat.

CHAPTER II

YING TAOTAI

AND then, he returned into the dark room below where, armed as he now was, he felt that, if the worst came to the worst, he could give a better account of himself.

The lamplight through the shattered door fell upon a long-necked vase of old Chinese pottery that lay broken at Mark's feet. He remembered Jen-te as he waited; he thought of her as if she, too, were a treasure in porcelain, frail and precious, that it was his privilege to safeguard and to keep.

There was silence in the street, where he could hear neither movement nor human voices. It afforded him some satisfaction to remember that every minute the enemy delayed brought his Chinese bride nearer to security as Ah Li's *wupan* crossed the bay in the starlight.

Lost in his thoughts, a dreamer even in a crisis, he failed to perceive a naked arm thrust to the elbow through the broken doorway, fingers that groped and then stealthily drew back the bolt.

Four men, upon a sudden, tumbled into the room as the door was flung back violently upon its hinges. From what Mark could see of them, they were of the coolie class. Their pigtails were coiled and they were stripped to the waist.

Knowing that he would be overpowered if he stayed where he was, Mark retreated to the stairway, which was narrow and where he hoped that he could hold his own.

The first man went to the ground with a blow on the point of the chin that left him wits enough for no more than Cantonese obscenity; after which the other three were kept at bay without great difficulty, until a fat figure in a long dark robe appeared upon the threshold, where he stood puffing at a cigar and fanning the smoke from his face.

It was the broken earthenware vase that settled the matter once and for all; for one of the Chinese, finding this by chance, flung it at Mark's head to such good effect that the American dropped half senseless. And a moment after, Mark Hebden was a prisoner in his own house in Portuguese Macao.

With short lengths of rickshaw-rope they bound him hand and foot, and then carried him up the stairs, where they entered the room from which Jen-te had escaped. Before he was thrown to the floor, Mark glanced through the open window. There was no sign of Ah Li's *wupan* upon the calm water of the bay. Jen-te, for the time being, was safe.

They found the lamp, and lighted it. And then, in obedience to the orders of Ying Taotai, who came panting into the room, completely out of breath at the top of a dozen stairs, they ransacked the house from roof to floor, searching for Jen-te in vain.

The lamp burned upon a table at which sat the mandarin, straddle-legged across a chair, upon the back of which he leaned his folded arms, while he gazed with bovine contemplation at his captive.

For five minutes or longer not a word was said. Upon Ying Taotai's face there was no shadow of expression. It was just fat and featureless, impenetrable and sleepy.

The coolies returned, to report that they could find no one in the house. At which Ying Taotai bit so deeply into the end of his cigar that the brown juice trickled from the corner of his mouth to his double chin.

"To whose safe keeping," he asked, "have you entrusted one fairer than a water-lily? Answer me truthfully and I will spare your life. As for that, I give my word, and my word is my bond—as all men will tell you in Tong-chau."

Mark was already determined not to answer. Ying Taoti sighed.

"Add not to the troubles already yours," said he. "You know our Chinese proverb: 'Every man must expect a few fleas?' Even the gods may groan."

He raised his eyebrows a trifle, as if more surprized than annoyed, and then got slowly to his feet.

"We should experience no difficulty," said he, "in compelling you to speak."

In the same oily, motionless voice he gave his instructions to his men, while he himself went to the window where he stood looking out upon the harbor and smoking what remained of his cigar.

The moon had made the square flat-roofed houses of the Portuguese as white as marble. Upon the crest of the hill tall palms stood forth like tracery against the blue-black sky. The lights of the town and the *sampans* were mirrored on the surface of the sea.

They lifted Mark to the table-top, and there they tied him down so securely that he could not move a fraction of an inch. One of them broke off a leg of a chair, shortened this with his knife to about eight inches, and cut through the middle of it a narrow slit. And here was a simple instrument of torture, as ingenious and devilish as any yet devised.

Mark Hebden's pigtail had attained such presentable dimensions that when they unplaited his hair, it hung down his back almost to his waist. A handful of this hair was passed through the slit and drawn tight, before it was wrapped round and round the wood. Ying Taotai, the Magistrate of Tong-chau, appeared neither to derive satisfaction from the ghastly operation that he witnessed, nor to experience feelings of horror or disgust.

The wood acted after the fashion of the bobbin on a spinning-loom, the human hair being wound round and round it, after the manner of thread, as two men twisted it in their hands, using all their strength. As a result, the hair, by means of a process both prolonged and terrible, was torn gradually and slowly from the skull.

There were regular pauses in the process of the torture, brief moments of respite for the sufferer, when the mandarin held up a hand, and questioned Mark in a soft, conciliatory voice.

Mark clenched his teeth, at first; but, because he was human, he very soon let out a scream, as the roots of his hair were wrenched from his head. But, because he was a white man, and because he loved Jen-te, he strove to hold his peace—until they grasped a second lock of hair with the intention of going through the same process again.

He bore the agony until he had all but fainted. Momentary relief from his tortures was like a breath of air to a suffocating man. He heard Ying's soft voice as if it came to him from far away.

"Have you sampled enough of such meager hospitality as I can offer you," he asked, "or would you experience more?"

The torture continued. Mark was no coward; but he had endured as much as was humanly possible. He had suffered to the limit of his fortitude. He knew that the Chinese had devised a whole system of the most elaborate and mutilating tortures, that were proof alike of Chinese brute-like want of sympathy and blunted sensibilities. He had heard, moreover, of Ying Taotai by repute. The District Magistrate of the city of Tong-chau had sentenced prisoners to have their ankle-bones broken with hammers, to be deprived of their ears, and to have the tendons severed in their legs.

Remembrance of Jen-te, his porcelain bride, was overclouded by the horror of the moment and a dread of the future. There came a time when he could visualise her no longer, when her image had faded altogether from his mind.

"I surrender," he gasped. "Enough!"

Ying Taotai did not smile. He was incapable of smiling. But he opened his fan with a snap.

"Whither the Lotus Flower?" he asked.

"In Heung Shan," said Mark. "In the house of a fisherman."

"That will be easy to find," said the mandarin. "There are not twenty houses on the island. And because I am a mandarin and a man of honor, I spare your life."

He threw his cigar from the window into the sea and went, fanning himself, from the room, his men following in single file, each one looking back from the doorway with a grin.

Mark fainted after they were gone. Bound down to the table, he lay there all night, semi-conscious, aching in every bone.

It was not until late upon the following afternoon that he was rescued by the merest chance. The neighbors knew well enough that there had been some disturbance in the earlier part of the night; but it was not in the celestial nature of them to inquire what had taken place. They had more than a genius for minding their own affairs; superstition rigidly demanded that they should hold themselves aloof.

It was Fen Hing, a peddler, who sold trinkets to Jen-te, who called at the foot of the stairs and heard Mark's cry for help. He went up and cut the prisoner's bonds, and did no more than shrug his shoulders, when Mark, without a word of explanation, rushed like a madman from the house.

At the end of the Praia Grande were some score of *sampans*, and here a group of straw-hatted boatmen sat gossiping over their opium-pipes. Mark flung himself into the midst of them, sprang into a boat, and shoved it clear.

The owner joined him with a flying leap. Bruised and indignant, he shrieked his protests.

"Heung Shan!" cried Mark, pointing excitedly across the bay.

Swaying at the stern oar, he sent the *sampan* flying over the water. The boatman, accepting both Fate and the dollar Mark had flung him, crawled under the awning where he sat biting the coin, content to let his passenger do the work.

The *sampan* grounded on the beach of Heung Shan at sundown. Mark had no notion of the name of Ah Li's coolie; but presently, he came upon a fisherman who knew the man and pointed out a little stone-built house that stood half hidden by trees upon a hilltop, with a dilapidated roof that could have afforded but small protection against the heavy tropical rains.

When Mark approached this building, it was almost dark; and his heart sank within him when he saw that the door was wide open and there was no light within. There came to his ears a sound that could not be mistaken. It was a groan, sustained and yet so faint as to be barely audible.

At that, he entered—he knew not why—on tiptoe; except that the groan that he had heard was like that of a dying man.

As his eyes grew accustomed to the half-light, he observed the débris on the floor, the plaster that had fallen from the walls, a broken chair, a ruffled mattress; while the wooden joists of the doorway had been splintered as with an ax.

He found and lighted a candle-end which, stuck into the neck of a bottle, disclosed another door, leading to an even smaller room beyond. And it was here he found Ah Li, suspended in mid-air—midway between the world of *samshu* and ivory opium-pipes and the spirits of his forebears.

The Cantonese was hanging by the neck from a beam that supported the roof. He was still breathing, though with the greatest difficulty. He was black in the face and his features screwed and pinched. All but unconscious, he could neither speak nor see, and dared not try to move.

Mark cut him down, rubbed his neck where the tight rope had chafed him, worked his arms to restore respiration, and gave him water to drink.

Great though the physical vitality of a Chinese is, it was midnight before Ah Li was able to speak. And then he related how Ying and his men had come, and how they had broken in, and seized Jen-te who had been asleep in the inner room.

"There is a kind of clemency," the Taotai had declared, "in a slow and lingering death, since it affords both time and opportunity for serious reflection."

And he had hanged Ah Li, then and there, that he might reflect and slowly strangle; and there can be no doubt that Mark saved the Cantonese in the nick of time.

But they had taken Jen-te away—not back to the flower-boats of Canton, but far up the West River, to where the Yu-kiang comes down from the Kwang-si hills. There in the close-packed, steaming city of Tong-chau was the *yamen* of the Taotai.

It took Ah Li twenty-four hours to recover; and when his strength had returned, he became quite suddenly seized with *chi*—a mental condition, or affliction, peculiar to the East. For *chi* is a kind of madness, the demonstration of uncontrollable, insensate wrath. Ah Li went out into the night, and roamed among the palm-trees, shaking his fists at the moon, and cursing and complaining loudly in a high-pitched voice.

He cursed Ying Taotai, the mandarin of Tong-chau, by all the gods and devil-gods of the ancient Three Religions. Then he went back to the house, the spirit of *chi* having burned itself out within him. He was calm now, sitting upon his haunches, with folded hands. He even smiled and nodded, when he caught Mark's questioning look.

"My brother," said he, "you understand *feng-shui*. Why is neither man nor woman nor child ever saved from drowning in the Canton River?"

"Because of *feng-shui*," said Mark. "No one but a fool will save another, because by so doing he takes all that man's troubles upon himself."

Ah Li nodded approval.

"You have shouldered the burden of my destiny," said he. "Still, be not altogether downcast."

The Cantonese was about to roll an opium-pill, when Mark Hebden caught him by the shoulders.

"Listen," said he. "Can you find your way into the *yamen* of Ying Taotai? As you have sworn by your gods, so do I swear, too, by everything I hold as sacred. I will meet Ying face to face, and compel him to restore Jen-te to me. I have seen enough of him to know that he values her far less than his own pampered life."

Ah Li rolled his pill, burned the opium over his little spirit-lamp and sucked his pipe. The drug may have soothed him, for he smiled.

"We journey to Tong-chau," said he, "you and I. We risk our lives; but what of that! You shall meet Ying Taotai face to face—and alone."

And then, he chuckled.

"Would that I could be there!" he added. "But I am a man of peace."

CHAPTER III

IN THE YAMEN

AH LI'S *wupan* was loaded with silk that he intended to sell at a profit in Wu-chau; and early one morning, the wind being favorable, and the Taoist gods propitious, they set sail to the accompaniment of many firecrackers. Mark Hebden, to frighten away the evil spirits, discharged into the water the five chambers of a revolver that he had purchased in Macao; while Ah Li had painted big green eyes upon the bows of his *wupan*, that the boat might see where they were going.

Time was of no importance to Ah Li. They passed through the city of Canton, but it took them weeks to reach Wu-chau. For the Cantonese must go ashore whenever the spirit moves him, to smoke opium and feast and sleep, and argue with chance acquaintances he met in inns. Often they left the main river, when the wind was against them, to follow narrow, winding canals, where they were obliged to propel the *wupan* by means of the long oar at the stern. In these canals they were often delayed for days at a time, at places where it was not possible for them to pass, where the waterway was choked from one bank to the other by deserted, anchored shipping.

Ah Li was never indignant or impatient. He was never even annoyed. He was always content to bide his time. He would wait until the master of some large river-junk that blocked the canal would come back from an opium debauch; and when the passage was at last clear, and there was nothing to prevent them from continuing their journey, Ah Li himself, perhaps, was nowhere to be found.

It was an Oriental pilgrimage; but, in the end they came to the mouth of the Yu-kiang, the river that flowed through the walled city of Tong-chau, the headquarters of the Taotai.

A little below the city, they left the main river for a tributary, the Fwa-kiang, upon which they came upon a wide lake where there was a village of earth-built houses; while, about a mile away, a five-storied and beautiful porcelain pagoda stood upon an island, shining like silver in the sun.

"There are Four Wonders in all China," Ah Li observed: "the Demons of Tong-chau, the Thunder of Lung-chau, the Great Tide of Hangchau, and the Pagoda of Fwa, which is dedicated to the Water Dragon."

"And why have you come here?" Mark asked.

"Because it is best," said the Cantonese, "that I first go into the city alone, to spy out the land and make friends. And besides, there are palms in every *yamen* that may be oiled with gold-leaf and silver, and we have money enough for our purpose. You will wait for me," he continued, "at the shrine of the Water Dragon. Wind has conveyed us hither. Surrounded by water, in this place you will be safe; since from these two elements, wind and water—as all Taoists know—comes *feng-shui*. The gods will be propitious. Our enterprise will prove successful."

It would be useless, as Mark knew, to ask the Cantonese to explain these extraordinary superstitions. The American was well aware that there was a practical side to the character of the Cantonese upon which he might safely rely.

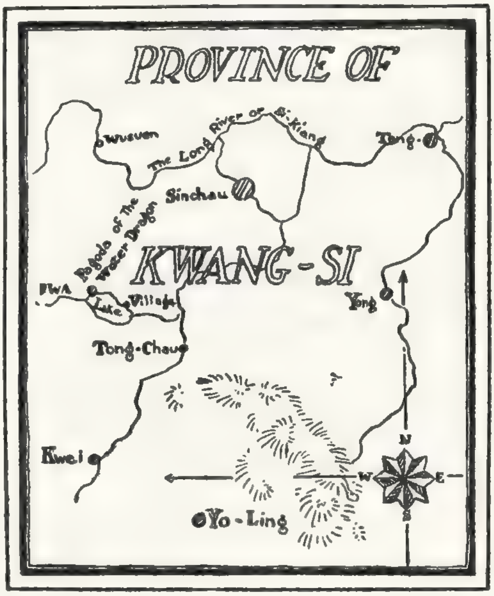
They called at the village, where they purchased supplies and a somewhat dilapidated *sampan* in which, the following day, Ah Li set forth alone across the lake and down the river, to the city of Tong-chau.

For a whole week Mark was left alone with no companion on the island but his own thoughts. He was so foolish as to hope—or else, he may have had a singular presentment—that he would again set eyes upon Jen-te.

There was little chance that Ah Li would be recognized in the city, even if he should meet the mandarin himself; for he had taken the precaution of growing a beard, and had become so burned by the sun, and so thin from hard work on meager fare, that he looked another man.

In Tong-chau the Cantonese paid almost daily visits to the *yamen* of the Taotai, where he struck up an acquaintanceship with Pen Yeh, the commander of the mandarin's bodyguard—a tall, sour-visaged man, dressed in a short, plum-colored coat and voluminous trousers of the same material, who wore enormous tortoise-shell spectacles with blue glass that made him look like a specter.

Ah Li was interested in the fate of Jen-te in much the same way as he might have been interested in fireworks, a tame singing-bird or a painted kite. Placid and impenetrable as he appeared, and although he had declared often enough that he was a man of peace, his main motive was to be revenged upon the Taotai who had hanged him by the neck and left him to die in the island of Heung-shan. With this object in view, he was resolved to take almost any risk and to use Mark Hebden as his tool.



He made himself familiar with the interior of the *yamen*. Professing himself the friend of Pen Yeh, with whom he indulged in many an opium night, he bribed one of the soldiers. And then he returned to Mark at the Pagoda of the Water Dragon on the Fwa-kiang.

They sailed the *wupan* down the river to Tong-chau and, posing as wealthy merchants from Canton, entered by the southern gate—for persons of importance should always enter a Chinese city from the south. They hired a room in an enormous caravanserai where human beings, horses and mules were herded together like so many sheep in a pen.

No one suspected for a moment that Mark was not a Chinese; for here they spoke a different dialect, and it was natural enough that a stranger from a distant province should have some difficulty in making himself understood.

The *yamen* was a place of walls within walls, and many detached, irregular buildings, similar in nothing, save that all were roofed with the same blue tiles, upon each of which was stamped the Imperial dragon. Among these buildings were the courthouse, the barracks of the Taotai's soldiers, the quarters of his numerous attendants and retainers, stables, outhouses, kitchens and —within the inner wall—the actual palace, or *fu*, of the mandarin.

The place was crowded when Ah Li strolled past the gate, accompanied by Mark. He exchanged a friendly greeting with the sentry who asked him if he had eaten rice that day—the national "How do you do?" All manner of people waited in the courtyard, from wealthy merchants to coolies. There were soldiers off duty; farmers from remote districts of the province, who had been waiting days to present petitions to the Taotai; smooth-faced, silk-robed students; fat, prosperous-looking merchants; straw-hatted chair-coolies, who shoveled rice into their mouths with their dirty hands, while they gambled for *copper-cash*—to say nothing of ducks and pigs and stray, starving dogs. For the *yamen* of a Chinese mandarin is, in very truth, an epitome of all China: dirt, delay, disorder and lassitude; scores of people waiting patiently to do nothing, while the great man himself lies upon cushions, inhaling the fumes of the drug the sale of which is strictly forbidden by an edict signed by himself and posted upon the walls of his palace.

Ah Li seemed to know every one there. No one asked him what he wanted. He passed from one group to another, chatting affably, nodding and sucking his teeth; and then he and his companion sat down upon the steps of a one-storied building constructed against the outer wall, where he pretended to fall asleep.

It was growing dark. One by one the people were leaving the courtyard. A mandarin's chair passed out through the gate that led from the private apartments of the Taotai. In front of the chair went a man who bore a gong, who would cry out through the public streets the rank and station of his master, that all who were of lesser degree might make way for the mandarin. That this dignitary had been paying a call upon the Taotai was apparent, for another man carried his visiting card, which was a red piece of paper about a yard square, upon which was his name. He had probably spent the whole afternoon with his host, exchanging compliments and discussing trivialities; for the courteous Chinese caller never shows the slightest inclination to go.

Mark had already received his instructions from Ah Li. When it was almost dark, and they were about to close the *yamen* gate, the Cantonese touched his companion lightly on an arm.

"Do as I do," said he. "We must be sure that no one sees us."

He was furtively watching the few people who were still within the courtyard. Suddenly, without rising to his feet, he began to work himself backward up the steps, Mark following his example. In the interior of the outhouse, Ah Li spoke for the first time in a voice above a whisper.

"No one will find us here," said he. "I have examined this place already. In a few minutes the *yamen* gate will be closed."

The outhouse—which was no more than a kind of barn—was filled with all kinds of lumber. There was a broken Pekin cart that did not appear to have been used for centuries; there were bales of hay, fodder for mules and ponies; a bundle of old, rusty flintlocks, and sundry building materials, among which were some stone tablets upon which were graven extracts from the Confucian canon. Ah Li calmly lay down in the midst of the hay and composed himself for sleep.

"But what if the hay should be wanted?" Mark suggested.

"I have satisfied myself as to that," said the Cantonese. "This fodder is put here for the Taotai's guests. He will receive no callers tonight." And almost immediately Ah Li fell sound asleep.

Mark did not sleep. He did not attempt the impossible; for, apart from the fact that he was acutely conscious of his peril, the place was overrun with rats. They scuttled over his chest, and romped and raced and played in the old Pekin cart. They were seen coming and going across the threshold in the moonlight, seeking for offal in the courtyard. They were to be heard gnawing, squealing and fighting in all parts of the roof.

But Ah Li slept through it all, like one who is conscience-free. He even snored loudly.

Mark, to pass the time, crept to the doorway and looked out into the courtyard.

There was no one about. It was difficult to believe that this place, a few hours before, had been crowded. The ground was littered with rubbish of all kinds, but no sign of life was anywhere to be seen, save the lights in the windows of the guard-house. Mark crawled back to the bales of hay, where he found Ah Li, wide awake and sitting upright.

"It is two o'clock," said the Cantonese. "The road should be clear."

The behavior of the worthy Ah Li upon that eventful night supplied Mark Hebden with ample proof of the iron nerves of a Chinese. The round-faced Cantonese was at once cautious and deliberate. He never hesitated. He led the way on tiptoe, as stealthily as a cat, keeping for the most part to the shade beneath the walls. When he spoke to Mark, he did so in a whisper; and there was no suspicion of a tremor in his voice.

He had already learned all he wanted to know concerning the lie of the land. He made half the circuit of the outer wall, giving as wide a berth as possible to the servants' quarters and the barracks, and when it was necesssary to cross an open, moonlit space, from one building to another, he first made sure that there was nobody about.

And thus they gained the wall that divided the courtyard from the palace, or private apartments, of the Taotai. Here they were comparatively safe; for many small buildings, of different shapes and sizes, were huddled together like houses of cards constructed by a child—and looked as if they could be knocked down as easily. Growing in the midst of them was a large mulberry tree, one of the branches of which overhung a gabled roof that reached almost to the level of the wall.

Ah Li tiptoed to the mulberry tree, and bidding Mark follow him, climbed without difficulty to the horizontal branch, which was strong enough to bear the weight of them both. Along this they worked their way, only partially shaded by the leaves from the light of the moon, until they were able to lower themselves to the roof.

They made no sound; for they wore Chinese shoes, the soles of which are of felt. Ascending the gradient of the roof, Mark found that he was tall enough to hoist himself to the top of the wall, where he hauled up Ah Li.

They were now able to look down into a spacious garden in which were many trees and flowering shrubs, traversed by a pathway, that led to a one-storied building, the overhanging roof of which was supported by many pillars. About ten feet below them was an irregular platform, and opposite this a garden-theater, the stage protected by a roof that curled upward like a drake's tail at each of its four corners.

In the moonlight the whole scene was strangely picturesque. It was like a glimpse of an old, forgotten world. For, not only was the place deserted; but many of the buildings had been left unfinished, and grass, and even shrubs, had taken root and grown upon the very roofs.

Ah Li, without a word, lowered himself from the wall, hung for a moment at the full extent of his arms, and then dropped lightly to the platform. Mark followed; and together they passed down a steep slope, at the foot of which they ascended some rickety wooden stairs that led to the stage where the actors from Canton, in their embroidered robes padded with cotton-wool, were wont at times to perform before the Taotai.

The *fu*, or palace, of the mandarin caught the moonlight; it was dark only under the eaves. Ah Li squatted down upon his haunches, very like a benevolent and friendly ape.

"Observe the fourth window to the right of the entrance," said he. "If you are careful, you should be able to climb in without being seen or heard. You will find yourself in a passage in which is a door that is painted gold. And beyond that door, you will find Ying, the Taotai of Tongchau."

"You are sure of it?" asked Mark.

Ah Li nodded.

"I have my information from my friend, Pen Yeh," said he.

"And where is my Jen-te?"

"She will be in the women's quarters, at the other end of the building," answered the Cantonese. "If you attempt to go there, you will be discovered. The doors are locked, and there are armed eunuchs on guard. I have selected this night for an excellent reason. Ying has an audience with the Prefect of the Province at an early hour. When he retired to rest, he gave strict orders that he was on no account to be disturbed."

The American produced his revolver, opened the breech and satisfied himself that all the chambers were charged.

"And you await me here?" he asked.

"My friend," the astute Cantonese replied, "who of his own free will would put his head into a wooden cage? And besides, if you are caught—which the gods forbid—it will avail you nothing, if I am captured, too. Have your will with Ying Taotai, then return by the way we have come. You will find me in the outhouse; and then the sentry who will be on duty has been bribed to let us through.

Mark said nothing, but began to descend the wooden stairs on tiptoe that led down from the garden stage.

Below, he paused for a moment, realizing that his heart was beating quicker than he liked. Looking back, he could see the figure of Ah Li, who had already clambered to the wall.

This business were not worth the peril if he himself were not worthy of Jen-te. It was for her sake he was here, that he had followed her into the very heart of China. At any rate, the night's work—however it might end—would settle the question one way or the other. Jen-te was either Mark Hebden's Chinese bride or the plaything of Ying Taotai.

He approached the *fu*, creeping cautiously from shrub to shrub, until he found himself under the great hanging eaves of the roof. The window that Ah Li had pointed out to him was wide open, and moreover, was dimly illumined by a shaded light within.

Mark stood stock-still and listened. He could hear nothing; there might have been no one about, though it was certain that armed retainers were on duty. The more time he took to gain the Taotai's room, the greater would be his danger. He swung himself through the window, to find himself—as Ah Li had told him—in a long stone-paved passage at the far end of which was a round oil-paper lantern.

Fifteen yards, half running and half walking, brought him to the gilded door, where he hesitated again. And then a sudden recollection of that great crease of fat upon the back of the mandarin's neck so enraged him and strengthened his determination that he clenched his teeth, grasped the handle of the door and turned it.

Opening the door an inch, he discovered that a bright light burned within the room, which he entered swiftly and noiselessly, and closed the door behind him.

Scarlet embroideries were hanging on the walls. The room was stifling from the heat of the *kang*, upon which the mandarin himself lay with his legs curled up—more than ever like a white sow in its straw. By the side of the couch was a carved blackwood table upon which were a silver and ivory opium-pipe, a spirit-lamp, a china bowl of opium and a cheap alarm clock.

Very deliberately, Mark Hebden knelt down by the side of the divan, and laid the fingers of his left hand upon the fat throat of the Taotai. Ying did no more, at first, than half open his eyes; but when he had grasped the fact that the object of his immediate attention was the circular muzzle of a gun-metal revolver, he attempted in vain to rise.

"One word," said Mark, in a whisper, "and you die."

CHAPTER IV

THE WORD OF A TAOTAI

IN AN atmosphere of over-heated air and opium smoke, and under the stress of the occasion, the mandarin broke quite suddenly into a steaming perspiration.

There were in that room a number of cheap clocks of European manufacture—the hobby of a strangely civilized collector, who found in these commodities something at once novel and engaging—and the ticking of these was like the persistent chirping of some score of crickets. Mark felt that the noise was in some way the reaction of his own jangled and disordered nerves; for, though the hand that held the gun was steady enough for his purpose, he trembled within him lest at any moment the door should be opened by a servant or retainer, or Ying Taotai should so lose possession of his reason as to cry out for help.

The mandarin's small pig-eyes were opened as widely as was possible. His lips were seen to move, though for some seconds he was voiceless.

"You are from Macao?" he gasped, at length.

"A long journey," answered Mark, who thought it best to warn him again that, if he spoke above a whisper, he breathed his last.

"But this is an outrage!" the mandarin protested. "Why have you followed me?"

"I have followed Jen-te," said Mark. "I would follow her to the end of all the world."

A ray of returning confidence illumined the fat and oily features of the Taotai.

"Then, this is no act of vengeance," he asked, "for such inconvenience as I was loath to cause you?"

Mark laughed under his breath.

"I had forgotten all that," said he, "before ever the wounds upon my scalp had healed. I am here to wring from your lips, in the sanctity of your own *yamen*, and at dead of night, the surrender of my wife. Before I leave this room, you renounce all claim to her—or die."

The mandarin lifted himself a little on his elbows.

"There is no need for that," said he, with a nod at the revolver. "We may meet as peace-talkers, you and I. I understand, from what Song Wu, the father of Jen-te, has told me, that you are a foreigner. I should never have believed it."

Under the pretense of moving one of the silken pillows behind his back, he had carried his hand to within a few inches of a bell-rope when Mark grasped him by the wrist and dragged him from the divan to the floor. At that, abject terror was stamped once again upon that round and bloodless face, and Ying was speechless, fearing instant death.

"When I was in your power," said Mark, "I received neither justice nor mercy, you remember. Attempt to give the alarm, and I kill you in self-defense. However, I am here to put right—so far as that is possible—the wrongs that you have done me. Your Peacock's Feather can not protect you now."

"I am not one," said the mandarin, with meekness, "who would quarrel with overwhelming Fate. I know the wisdom of submission. I have told you, I accept your terms. If you know aught of me, you know my reputation; I am a man of honor."

"I demand security of some sort," said Mark. "I leave that to you. Were you to restore her to me now, you would find some means to trick me, and I should never pass without these walls."

"I could not summon her hither," answered Ying, "even were I so disposed—because she is not here."

"Not here! Where is she then? Confess the truth!"

"At my summer residence in the hills above Yo-ling. Thence I returned, a week ago, to transact official business."

"Corruption and coercion!" Mark took him up. "What is your official business, but to live in luxury and grow fat upon injustice?"

Seized by a sudden fit of uncontrollable wrath, he grasped the mandarin by the throat so strongly that the fat bulged out between his fingers.

"Because you have counted Jen-te, the daughter of Song Wu," he got out between his teeth, "among the painted chattels that you buy to do your bidding, I strangle you, here and now!"

Ying had breath enough for but a single word.

"Mercy!" he wheezed.

Mark released him for a moment; whereat the Taotai, who was as shrewd as the pig he resembled, was not slow to snatch his chance.

"Murder me," said he, "and you achieve nothing. Unless I give the order, how can you ever set eyes on her again?"

"Am I to have nothing but your word?" asked Mark.

"The honor of a mandarin," Ying answered, "a lord of the Peacock's Feather. I swear by the Temple of Heaven."

"That you send her back to me?"

"Listen," said the mandarin. "Give me breath to speak and leave to think. Whence came you hither?"

"From the Pagoda of the Water Dragon on the Fwa-kiang," said Mark.

"Then, listen," said Ying again; "return thither and await my pleasure. You may rely upon the promise of a Taotai. I will send Jen-te to you there."

"I have your word for that?" said Mark.

"The honor of a mandarin," Ying answered. "Nor would I be forgetful of true Chinese courtesy. She shall journey in a wedding-barge, hung with red cloth, with red lanterns and curtains of scarlet and gold. She shall return to her lord and master like a queen, to the strains of music and the beating of a gong. She shall be powdered and enameled, dressed in purple and red, adorned with tinsel and flowers and gems. And her hair shall be piled high like the hair of a Manchu maiden, and tied with a string of pearls. Ying Taotai gives his word."

It was as if the sound of his own voice, and the image he had pictured of a Chinese bride, had given him confidence and self-assurance. Though he was still prostrate on the floor, Mark kneeling by the side of him, Ying Taotai was the under-dog no longer. His little eyes were bright as beads, shining with subtle satisfaction.

Mark rose to his feet.

"Remember," said he, "the Pagoda of the Water Dragon."

"A fair place for a fairer deed," said Ying.

"My warning still holds good," said Mark. "I have yet to get out of this place alive. Cry out for help, and I kill you."

The Taotai shrugged his fat and heavy shoulders.

"I see," said he, "that I have yet to show you that you can trust me. Let me remind you, you can never succeed in your object, unless you leave the matter in my hands. Let me rise to my feet and summon one of my servants. I will grant you a safe passage from the *yamen*."

Mark hesitated. For a moment he was concerned in regard to the fate of Ah Li; but, on second thoughts, he felt assured that the wily Cantonese was well able to look after himself. And here was an occasion when the mandarin's good faith might be put to the proof. What risk there was he was resolved to take, for Jen-te's sake more than for his own.

"Understand," said he, "if it comes to blows, it will be I who strike first. If you play false with me, I am content to die, if you die first. With this I shoot you dead."

Ying started visibly at sight of the revolver, but controlled himself in an instant. He got to his feet, breathing heavily. In his little, bead-like eyes there was a strange expression; a sly twinkle that was accentuated by what might have been the red glint of anger.

Fearing that Mark might intervene, he pulled the bell-rope that hung from the wall by the side of the divan; and almost at once a servant entered who stood expressionless, awaiting orders.

"Bid Pen Yeh come here," said the Taotai.

The man departed without a word. Mark glanced suspiciously at Ying. He had heard of Pen Yeh from Ah Li, and knowing that this man was the commander of the Taotai's body-guard, he still feared treachery.

Ying must have read his thoughts.

"I know not how you gained admittance," said he, "nor shall I trouble to find out. It is certain that no one but the captain of my soldiers can pass you through the main gate at this hour of the night."

He opened a box of cigars, took out one and offered it to Mark—for no Chinese will offer a full cigar box to a guest, lest he should take the lot. Mark, thinking it possible that the tobacco might be poisoned, politely refused; whereat the mandarin, again reading his thoughts, forthwith put him to shame by lighting the very cigar himself.

And then, while Ying Taotai sat smoking, seated upon the ruffled couch, the halting footsteps of Pen Yeh were heard approaching along the corridor without.

Mark drew away from the mandarin, placing his back against the wall. He held his revolver in his right hand, hidden from any one who might enter, yet visible to Ying.

The Taotai—as if the tobacco he inhaled had calmed his nerves—sat slowly wagging his head from side to side. When Pen Yeh entered, he directed the glowing end of his cigar at Mark.

"I have here a distinguished guest," said he, "who this night has honored by his presence my simple, homely *fu*. You will be so good as to conduct him in person from the palace and see that he passes in safety, and without question, the *yamen* gate."

No further word was said. The mandarin rose to his feet and shook hands with himself in the approved Chinese manner. Mark, slipping his revolver into his pocket, followed the Taotai's example, bowed low, and went with Pen Yeh from the room.

He had time then, when they passed down the corridor by way of which Mark had entered, to take some stock of his companion. He had never seen the man before, and he was destined to see him but once again. A morose and gloomy-looking Chinese, he was about the same height and build as himself, and walked with a pronounced limp, taking a far longer stride with his right leg than with his left. As for the man's personal appearance, even when he faced Mark under the lamp above the door that led into the garden, there was little of his face to be seen, save an unhealthy, sallow complexion in which his blue tortoise-shell spectacles looked like huge hollow eye-sockets. From the time they left the mandarin's room until Mark was safely outside the *yamen*, Pen Yeh never uttered a single word.

They crossed the garden, and thence passed through another gate that led into the courtyard of the *yamen*, and here Mark looked anxiously toward the outhouse where he knew Ah Li to be in hiding. He realized, however, that any attempt to advise the Cantonese that he was safe would end only in disaster. Ah Li should be well able to look after himself. He would no doubt lay hidden all night long, and leave the *yamen* at daybreak when the gates were open, returning to the inn.

In obedience to Pen Yeh's orders, the sentry who was on guard unlocked the outer gate.

Mark Hebden passed through, as Ying Taotai had promised, unquestioned and unmolested.

He took in a deep breath when the great gate had closed behind him, and stood irresolute, trying hard to think. He felt that he wanted time to see in its true perspective the experience of the night. At that moment, he could have little doubt that Ying Taotai—as he had so often insisted—was a man of honor.

As a high-born Chinese, the Taotai had his pride; he would "lose face" if he broke his word. And he had sworn by the Temple of Heaven.

Mark had once already mistrusted him without a reason and falsely; he had suspected that a cigar was poisoned that the mandarin had smoked himself.

Also, Mark had been given a verbal passport that had brought him safe from the *yamen*, whereas Ying—had he contemplated treachery—might all too easily have played him false.

In a moment, Mark Hebden went upon his way toward the inn, light of heart and rejoicing. He had done all, or even more, than he had ever hoped to do. However distasteful it might be to the mandarin, Ying Taotai was chained and shackled to his own word of honor.

CHAPTER V

THE WEDDING-BARGE

MORE than an hour had elapsed since Mark Hebden and the Cantonese had climbed the palace wall above the garden theater, and not only was the dawn fast spreading in the east, but almost every minute more people were appearing in the streets. The shopkeepers were taking down the shutters of their shops; hawkers—it seemed on purpose, with the malice of forethought—were setting up their booths wherever they were most likely to interfere with the traffic. Greasy pork-butchers were placing large bowls of chopped-up meat upon tables that within an hour or so would be exposed to the fierce rays of the tropic sun.

Mark found the inn without difficulty. Large though it was, it was a ramshackle, wooden building that looked as if it might collapse at any moment. In former times, the porchway had been painted all the colors of the rainbow; but, long since, the paint had come away in flakes, with the result that the entrance had now a kind of piebald appearance.

Mark hurried in, with but a faint hope that he would find Ah Li awaiting him. The round-faced Cantonese was surely not likely to have deserted his friend at the eleventh hour.

This proved to be the case; for Ah Li's couch was vacant; and Mark, too tired to lie awake and think, flung himself down upon his mattress and almost immediately fell sound asleep.

He was awakened by a light touch upon a shoulder; and opening his eyes, he beheld the benevolent Ah Li, sitting cross-legged on the floor.

"And so the gods have smiled upon your fortunes," the Cantonese observed.

It was broad daylight. They could hear the voices of excited travelers, coolies and servants, in the great yard of the inn, from which came, also, the foul stench of rotting refuse and manure.

In as few words as possible Mark told Ah Li what had happened.

"It looks," said he, in conclusion, "as if the Taotai meant to hold to his word. Though he made no vow to spare my life, he let me go free. My suspicions that he might poison me were wholly without foundation. Is it possible, my friend, that he will, indeed, restore Jen-te to me?"

Ah Li was silent a moment. It was seldom that he looked serious; but he had a grave expression now.

"No high-born Chinese," he answered, "least of all a Manchu, will break the word he has given. His promise is enough. What he has sworn that will he do."

Mark sprang from his couch, and seized his old friend by both shoulders, giving vent to a display of emotion that proved that, in spite of his pigtail and his Chinese dress, he was still a white man under his sunburnt skin.

"I have you to thank for everything!" he cried. "How shall I ever repay you?"

The Cantonese shook his head.

"The bargain is not closed," said he, enigmatically. "If this enterprise has ended in peace-talk, then I am the loser; for I would have been revenged upon Ying Taotai. However," he added, "we shall see."

He spoke as if he had something at the back of his mind. Mark looked at him quickly and in something of alarm.

"Do you mean there may be treachery yet?" he asked.

Ah Li shrugged his shoulders.

"I can not say," said he, "though I am sure Ying Taotai will prove as good as his word."

"If you and I go back together to the Pagoda of the Water Dragon," Mark demanded, "why should not Ying send armed men to slay us there?"

"Had he so wished," Ah Li replied, "you had never left the *yamen* a living man. Your life was in his hands then. Your life is in his hands still. Why trust him one moment, and suspect him the next? You have no option. He has named a place where he has promised to send Jen-te. If you do not go there, you will never see her again. That at any rate is certain."

"Then we return this very day," said Mark.

"To the porcelain pagoda," said Ah Li, and shrugged his shoulders again, and went to the window, and looked out upon the crowd in the yard.

Mark followed him there, and spoke in a changed voice. Familiar as he now was with China, the ways and mode of thinking of the Chinese was still a mystery to him. The Cantonese was his friend, his constant companion and his faithful helpmate; and yet, such friendship as existed between them was without sympathy and without affection.

"I do believe," said he, "that all last night you suffered no anxiety on my behalf. Your object would have been achieved if you had heard this morning that both Ying Taotai and I myself were dead?"

Ah Li looked him straight in the face.

"That is the truth," he confessed.

Mark could not refrain from a smile.

"The East and the West are as separate as the poles," said he. "Perhaps I would not like you as well as I do, if I understood you better."

"What are we but the playthings of the gods?" declared Ah Li. "Fate has decreed that we return to the Pagoda of the Water Dragon. As I have said, Ying Taotai will keep his word."

That evening, they reembarked on board the *wupan*, and drifted on the current down the river to the junction of the Yu with the Fwa-kiang. Thence, hiring coolies from a neighboring *hong* to tow their boat, they passed into a valley that was shut in on either side by mountains, red in the sunlight, that were like the thrones of giants. The country for the most part was thickly wooded, such open spaces as there were being terraced into rice-fields, or else were a blaze of color where the opium-poppy was in bloom.

By night, in the light of the sickle moon and myriads of stars, the marble bridges beneath which the river flowed, the temples, joss-houses and great *pailows*, or memorial archways, some of which were many centuries old, that stood at regular intervals on either bank, made Mark Hebden feel that he had wandered into the Oriental fairyland of which he had once dreamed—a land that knew nothing of the dirt, the squalor and corruption that he had learned to know as China.

He lay in the prow of the *wupan*, dreaming of Jen-te, conjuring up visions of the porcelain bride that he had lost, trying to conceive her childlike glee when she set eyes again upon him whom she had called lord and master.

Mark was content to let Ah Li and the coolies do all the work. At every bridge it was necessary to lower the mast and take in the tow rope. But when they had gained the lake, the wind being favorable, they paid off the coolies and sent them back down the river, and set sail across the lake upon water that, broken by the breeze into myriads of ripples, was dazzling in the sunshine.

They found the island as deserted as when they had left it; and that night they made a camp-fire upon which to cook their rice not far from the pagoda, by the side of a waterfall that descended among trees into the lake.

It was a strange place in the moonlight; for upon the shore were the images of quaint mythical beasts—impossible elephants and preposterous camels—graven in stone, the sphinxes of old China. And here, too, half in the water, were ancient ruined buildings, temples that had once been dedicated to strange heathen gods who had fallen out of favor.

The image of Jen-te still held Mark's every thought. The hour and the place were in keeping with romance.

"She will come?" he asked. "Are you sure of it?"

"I am sure," said Ah Li.

"I want no more," said Mark.

"What is a woman?" asked the Cantonese, without emphasis and without surprize. "A man is *yang*, but a woman is *yin*. The one is the chief element in the universe. The other is nothing, of no more account than a frog."

"Jen-te is beautiful," said Mark.

"In a wife," observed Ah Li, "no more is necessary than she be neither bald nor idiotic. Thus the proverb has it."

Mark Hebden laughed.

"She is better versed than you, my friend, Ah Li, in the classic books and the writings of the sages."

The worthy Cantonese was never at a loss for an answer.

"Then," he replied, "her father was a fool. To educate a girl is to weed the field of another. It is like putting a gold chain around the neck of a puppy."

"Of a certainty," said Mark, "the East and the West are as separate as the poles."

For three days Mark Hebden waited on the island, a prey to such conflicting emotions as anticipation and suspense. He roamed the beach, his eyes seldom for long turned away from the calm water of the lake, the words of Ying Taotai's promise recurring again and again in his memory, as if it were something that he had once learned by heart.

"She shall come in a wedding-barge, hung with red cloth, with red lanterns and scarlet curtains. She shall journey like a queen, to the strains of music and the beating of a gong. She shall be painted and enameled and dressed in purple and red."

And then, at last, at sunset, Mark, lying half asleep upon a mossy bank a little distance from the shore, heard faint music far away and the beating of a gong. He sprang to his feet and hastened down to the lake, where he beheld approaching a red-draped wedding-barge under full sail, bearing straight for the pagoda.

The sky and the surrounding hills were red in the dying light of the sun. And the barge was red. She was like a great red lantern, light as a feather, that drifted slowly—with exasperating slowness—upon the calmness of the water.

Mark found Ah Li upon the threshold of the pagoda.

"She comes!" he cried. "Ying Taotai has kept his word."

On board the barge they were beating joy-gongs and playing native fiddles and guitars—one-stringed instruments from which they produced ear-splitting, long-drawn catcalls that carried far across the lake. And there was singing, too, in high-pitched voices which, though it was meant to signify rejoicing, was, indeed, like the screeching of owls.

Ably handled by six or seven men who wore the plum-colored uniform of the Taotai of Tong-chau, the unwieldy craft hove to in shallow water, but a few yards from the shore. She had swung round before she dropped her anchors, so that she lay alongside a mud-bank. Three men scrambled into the water, in which they were never more than knee-deep, and ran ashore a gang-plank, painted red to match the barge.

Mark waited at the foot of the gangway, his heart beating fast. He was greeted in ceremonial language by none other than Pen Yeh, the commander of the Taotai's bodyguard.

Pen Yeh, with his hands folded in the long sleeves of his plum-colored coat, bowed low.

"His Excellency, Ying Taotai, lord of Tong-chau, sends greetings," he announced. "Beyond the purple curtains, bejewelled and decked with flowers, the bride awaits her master."

Pen Yeh, still bowing, shuffled backward to the deck, making way for Mark. Amidships upon the wedding-barge, there was a kind of cabin, like a roundhouse on the deck of an eighteenth-century ship, save that it was hung—like a cubicle—with heavy, embroidered curtains. Mark approached this eagerly; but, not until he drew aside the curtains, did he suddenly become conscious of some terrible calamity impending.

The red sunlight streamed into a darkened, flowery compartment that was like a shrine. And there, seated upright upon a great, carved blackwood chair, was the girl whom he had loved and courted in Canton.

Her face was enameled, her eyebrows painted, and her lips red as rubies. Wrapped about her shoulders was a dark blue robe, embroidered with golden silk, and ornamented with many little oval mirrors, each framed with small seed pearls. Her black hair was adorned with a crown of pearls, from which pendents of yellow jade hung down to her shoulders.

She sat quite motionless, still as a statue, smiling as if she dreamed. She had been dressed for the wedding-feast—which was to her the feast of Death.

She had been poisoned by order of Ying Taotai, on board the barge, when within sight of the pagoda. Death had come swiftly and painlessly; and thus had Ying Taotai kept his word.

CHAPTER VI

THE GAUNTLET

MARK had not been able to believe. There are truths so insupportable as to be incredible. He had found Jen-te. He beheld, indeed, his Chinese wife as he had never seen her before, draped and adorned and painted as a Chinese bride should be. And more than she had ever been, she was like a precious piece of porcelain, waxen and delicately colored with the dull transparency of the jade necklace that she wore around her neck.

With a strengthless voice Mark cried her name, took one step toward her, and threw out his arms in a mute and pitiful appeal.

There was no light of recognition in those staring, almond eyes. Like a rigid, waxen, pretty doll, she sat enthroned in purple, immobile, inanimate.

The truth burst upon him like a sudden rush of ice. God! *She was dead!* Jen-te, a child, was dead!

For a moment, that one indubitable and overwhelming fact crushed every other thought from a mind half stupefied, distraught. He could not ask himself the why and wherefore of this appalling and unforeseen calamity. He neither heard the grating of the gang-plank as it was hauled back on board, nor was he conscious of the motion of the barge as she was shoved clear of the mud-bank into the deep water of the lake, where the wind caught the sail and bore her on her course away from the island shore.

The soul went out of him in one final, piteous appeal to Jen-te to return to the land of sunshine and confusion she had left. In those black, oval eyes, expressionless, without sympathy or sorrow, there was no answer; there was no ray of hope. And Mark Hebden saw then that the East had beaten him. Sobbing, he went down upon his knees at the "golden lily" feet of this lifeless Chinese girl.

At first, he dared not touch her. He kneeled like a devout priest before a holy shrine. And yet, stricken as he was, as a condemned man might observe with interest the faces of the jurymen who have sent him to the scaffold, the merest trivialities arrested his attention.

He marvelled at the splendor of her dress, the richness of the jewels that she was wearing. The little, pendent, oval mirrors, each with its frame of pearls, with which her lavishly embroidered robe was ornamented, fascinated him; and it was in one of these that, upon a sudden, he caught the reflection of a face.

It was miniature face, sinister and devilish, and yet familiar—a face that was as red as blood in the light of the crimson lamp that burned at the back of the kneeling, grief-stricken man. Mark had been about to rise to his feet, to kiss Jen-te on the lips—a long and cold farewell. He now remained where he was, staring into the little pearl-framed mirror, the power of thinking coming back to him slowly., as consciousness returns to one who has been saved from drowning.

The reason and the meaning of this thing was suddenly apparent. This was mandarin honor! Ying Taotai had kept his word.

And the face he saw in the looking-glass was the face of one who stood behind, waiting—the face of Pen Yeh. Those blue-glass spectacles were like the hollow eye-sockets of a skull, vacant of expression; but there was a thin, cruel mouth that grinned, suggesting an unholy satisfaction at the anguish of a doomed and beaten man.

In Mark Hebden a deliberate calmness, and something of a natural cunning, took the place of utter hopelessness. The instinct of self-preservation was still alive in him. He thought no longer of his own loss, not even of Jen-te.

Placing both hands upon the arms of the chair in which she sat, he half rose to his feet and kissed her on the lips. A blood-red kiss, for her lips were smeared with paint, and a grim determination to be revenged smoldered already in his heart.

It was no blind, insensate wrath. He could be as cautious and as subtle as Ying Taotai himself. For, as he rose, his eyes were still fixed upon the mirror, so that, inch by inch, he reviewed the tall, lean figure of Pen Yeh. And the man held in his hand a knife. He stood ready to stab Mark Hebden in the back.

Mark sank to his knees again, to think, not to pray for the soul of Jen-te or mourn her loss. He saw the whole thing now, and pictured Ying Taotai, sprawling on his silken cushions, a man of his word—a fat, complacent fiend. Moreover, the barge was moving, sailing steadily upon an even keel. They were returning to Tong-chau. And Pen Yeh had his orders—a knife thrust in the back, that the wedding-barge with the murdered bride and bridegroom might return to the *yamen* of the Taotai—a triumphal, funeral procession.

And if Pen Yah delayed to strike, it was solely that he might the longer enjoy the desolation of the sufferer and glory in the genius of his master. He stood there grinning, waiting, regarding the kneeling figure at his feet as an easy and unresisting victim, the final human sacrifice in this draped and gilded temple.

Mark, with his face buried in his hands, was thinking rapidly and clearly. He had both his revolver and his knife; but the former would give the alarm to all on board, and he was but one among many.

He was dry-eyed. It was as if his blood had become cold, burning with a desire to be revenged as ice itself may burn. He bowed low, like a man broken down by sorrow, and whipped his knife from his belt.

He turned, as a cat springs, without warning, without sound. Pen Yeh had neither time to retreat a step nor to strike in his own defense. The knife flew straight into his heart; and he went down as if he had been struck by a bullet.

Even then Mark's presence of mind did not desert him. Never had he been more capable of reasoning, or less conscious of excitement. Well aware of the dangers yet before him, his hand never trembled, nor did he hesitate an instant.

He tore Pen Yeh's coat from off him, before it could be saturated in the blood that came streaming from the fatal wound. Plum-colored as it was, it scarcely showed the stain.

He exchanged clothes with the dead man, and put on Pen Yeh's blue-glass tortoise-shell spectacles. And then, he stretched the man face downward at the foot of the shrine of Jen-te.

Robed as the commander of the Taotai's body-guard, he went on tiptoe to the curtains that gave upon the deck, drew them apart a little, and looked out.

The sun had set beyond the Yo-ling hills. Darkness was spreading fast upon the surface of the lake. He could see the Pagoda of the Water Dragon, standing forth like a tall, whitened sepulcher against the blackness of surrounding trees.

He could hear the murmur of the cascade upon the island—a distant dirge, a faint accompaniment to one of the musicians on the barge who idly thrummed a Chinese lute.

In a few minutes it would be dark, and disguised as he now was, it would be safe for him to appear upon the deck. On the other hand, the longer he delayed, the greater was the task before him, as the barge was steadily, though slowly, drawing farther away from the island.

He went back into that red-curtained chamber of death, and there stood thinking for a while, standing with folded arms, looking with hard, dry eyes at the waxen figure of Jen-te. There was neither sorrow nor anger on his face—nothing but a set determination to accomplish a definite purpose.

And then, as if his mind were suddenly made up, he turned and went straight upon the deck, pausing only to draw the curtains behind him.

Before him were, at least, a dozen men—soldiers, musicians and retainers from the Taotai's *yamen*. They could have known nothing of the real object of their mission;

for, their own day's work ended, they sat squatting on their haunches with their little bowls of rice. Possibly they did not even know that Jen-te herself was dead.

Mark stood regarding them a moment; and then, limping as he remembered Pen Yeh to have limped, taking a longer stride with his right leg than his left, he walked to the stern part of the barge.

The island was just visible in the gathering darkness and the white mist that was now spreading over the lake, through which he could just discern the porcelain pagoda—a ghostly sentry at the foot of jet-black hills.

Screened from view, to some extent, of those in the fore part of the boat by long poles on either side adorned with festoons and banners, he went overboard into the water, as silent as a seal, and holding his breath swam strongly under the surface, until he was forced to come up again to breathe.

He looked back at the barge, which still bore upon her course. He listened, and satisfied himself that no alarm had been given. And then he turned over on his side, and struck out for the island, swimming with all his strength.

His baggy, flimsy trousers clung to his knees and thighs, and did much to impede his progress. But he was in no haste, as he knew the moon rose early, and there was little chance that he might lose the island. There were times when he turned over on his back and lay resting, floating. And all the time, he was thinking, calmly and without emotion.

The alarmed and disconsolate Ah Li received the shock of his life, when a lean, blue-spectacled and dripping figure suddenly came forth from the water upon the island shore and stood before him in the moonlight. He had seen Mark board the barge and the gang-plank hauled up; and forgetful for the moment of the danger he was in, he had shouted loudly his remonstrance. But, when a knife was flung at him with a laugh, he had turned and fled into the woods, where he had hidden until the barge was under way.

Far from bemoaning his fate, he had returned to the Pagoda where he lighted a fire to warm himself and smoked his opium-pipe. He had no idea what had happened, but he was neither greatly perturbed nor curious. He would find out everything in due course; and if Mark were dead—then, such was Destiny! Such, too, was the Cantonese urbanity of the astute Ah Li.

Before lying down to rest, he had communed with himself, walking upon the lake shore, where a vision arose before him that he believed at first to be a ghost, and then recognized as his former acquaintance, Pen Yeh.

"It is Pen Yeh!" he exclaimed, in breathless surprize.

Mark took off the blue-glass spectacles, and with the other hand gripped Ah Li by an arm.

"It is myself," said he.

The round-faced Cantonese was obviously delighted.

"Did I not say that this place was good joss!" he declared. "The gods have surely favored you."

"Speak not of joss," said Mark, quite calmly, "when Jen-te is dead."

"Dead!" exclaimed Ah Li, his jaw dropping.

"Yes," said the other. "That was mandarin honor. I know it now. You were right, after all; that villain found the means to trick me. But, he has not done with me yet," he added, in the same quiet voice. "I go back to Tong-chau, and you, Ah Li, come with me. Moreover, there is no time to lose. The wedding-barge is before us."

Only on the last words did a note of irony sound in his voice. He was a man the master of himself and very resolved.

"It is well," said Ah Li.

Mark laughed—a hollow laugh, wholly without joy.

"It may be well for you, old friend," said he; "for you will be revenged. Such is my honor—for I have honor, too. Whether I live or die matters little; though I rely upon you to stand by at a safe distance, and save me if you can."

"My heart is steadfast," said the Cantonese. "In the past have I not proved it?"

"Henceforward," said Mark, "it is I who take command. Come, help me get the *wupan* under sail. We must overhaul the barge."

Leaving the Pagoda of the Water Dragon, where Mark Hebden left his heart, they crossed the lake in the moonlight, the *wupan*—the lighter and the handier craft—with the green eyes that Ah Li had painted on her bows, sighting the barge in the small hours of morning. They gave her a wide berth to windward, and were well ahead by the time they reached the river.

Thence the journey down-stream to the Yu-kiang was easy and without event. It was long after dark upon a certain evening when they returned to the walled city of Tong-chau.

It had been arranged between them that Ah Li should remain with the boat, moored to the river bank, a little below the city. And then, Mark, bidding farewell to his Cantonese friend, dressed in the plum-colored uniform of one of the servants of the Taotai and wearing Pen Yeh's spectacles, set forth alone upon his ultimate adventure.

He was in no haste. Neither had he any fear. The task that lay before him befitted the small hours of morning; and as many of the booths and shops were open, he went into a restaurant and regaled himself with a hearty meal, seated in a corner, speaking no word to any one.

After that, he wandered, until long after midnight, the narrow streets, but never ventured far from the *yamen* of the Taotai that seemed to attract his footsteps like a magnet.

He judged the hour to be nearly two o'clock, when he presented himself at the *yamen* gate. Though there was a great knocker there, he had no need to knock; for he was seen by the sentry beyond the iron grating, who took him for Pen Yeh.

He walked limping into the courtyard. His every action was predetermined. He went straight to the gate of the inner palace, though he might with less risk to himself have climbed the wall by the mulberry-tree.

This was a wooden gate in which was a wicket under a bell. When the wicket was withdrawn, the visitor was submitted to a brief inspection. And then the gate was opened.

He followed the central pathway that was spanned by a memorial arch. The garden theater was to his right. He intended to enter the *fu* by a window as secretly as possible. He knew that the corridors were illumined all night long; and if he were seen, he might be recognized.

This time, he did not pause or hesitate without the gilded door of the mandarin's room. He walked straight in. And there was Ying, as before, with his fat legs curled under him, sound asleep upon his silken cushions.

CHAPTER VII

ON THE WALL

IT WAS the same overheated, stifling atmosphere, redolent with the pungent smell of opium smoke. There was the same interminable noise of the ticking of many cheap clocks. But neither of these did Mark notice. He was conscious of nothing in the room, but that corpulent and gaping pig—for Ying Taotai slept with his little mouth wide open.

Without warning or a word, Mark took the mandarin roughly by the throat, and lifted him with a jerk into a sitting position.

"Wake up!" said he. "And make the most of what little time is left to you. You have not long to live."

"Pen Yeh!" the Taotai uttered.

Mark, with his free hand, removed his spectacles, threw them upon the couch, and then watched that fat face lengthen, while the little bead-like eyes stared at him in horrified amazement.

"Pen Yeh is dead," said he. "Did I not say to you that I would follow Jen-te to the end of all the world? But it is you, Ying Taotai, who now follow her footsteps to the grave. We are peace-talkers no more. I understand your honor."

The mandarin was petrified by fear. The color of his face had changed to a kind of leaden green. His thick, loose, little lips were seen to be quivering.

"I have money," he gasped. "Ask what you will of me in silver or gold-leaf, and it is yours."

Sheer terror had reduced his voice almost to a whisper. Mark answered between his teeth, with his lips scarce parting.

"It is my turn, now," said he "to speak of honor—the honor of a white man. I am here for that, for that only—and for justice."

The Taotai, like a drowning man, was ready to clutch at any straw.

"Consider the penalty," said he. "How can you hope to escape?"

"By the way I came," said the other. "As Pen Yeh, I entered; and as Pen Yeh, I go."

Ying was silent a moment. His little eyes cruised restlessly around the room. He was out of reach of the bell. He dared neither move nor cry out for help, lest he should be slain upon the instant. And yet—though he was at the last ditch, and knew it—he juggled with words for his life, or, at least, a respite.

"If neither money nor considerations for your own safety will move you," said he, "if your mind is made up, yet, surely, you will give me time for some charitable bequests? There are my dependents to consider, the members of my household."

"Not a minute!" said Mark. "Not a breath! I have learned something already of your charity."

Talking, Ying had slowly swung both legs to the floor, and seeing that he had been allowed to do this without interruption, had gained something in confidence. Mark, too, had seated himself upon the divan, by the side of, and not more than a few inches from, the mandarin.

They looked each other straight in the face—a cat and a mouse; the one fascinated, terrified, the other alert.

"There in one circumstance," said Ying, "that it may be worth your while to remember. I am a man of my word, as experience has taught you. Kill me, if you will, you can never escape from the *yamen* alive."

He had spoken with the utmost conviction. Mark stared at him, amazed.

"You are too sure of that," he laughed.

The Taotai slowly shook his head. The fat under his chin and around his neck was more conspicuous than ever.

"What I have said," said he, "I know."

Without moving his eyes from Mark, he stealthily carried a hand to the little blackwood table at his bedside. Though his fingers were fat, they were deft. With a thumb and forefinger he found and turned, upon twice the circumference of a circle, the little knob that controlled both the hands of the clock.

"Fool!" cried Mark. "Do you think that you can frighten me?"

He had jerked out the first word with such sudden vehemence that the mandarin had started and withdrawn his hand swiftly from the clock. Though nothing in the universe could then have saved Ying Taotai's life, the Fates had turned against him.

Mark gripped him without violence by the throat and dragged him to his feet.

"Gold and life are nothing to me," he growled. "I came here only for this—"

He caught the mandarin's long pigtail and wrapped it twice around his throat, which he still grasped with his other hand. Ying tried to struggle, but was powerless. He tried to cry out, but he was already almost throttled. He could do nothing but twist round and gaze with staring eyes at the face of the clock upon the little blackwood table.

And hope went out from his heart as a candle is extinguished in the wind. He had turned the hands at random, without being able to see what he was doing; and they pointed at two minutes to four—the hour at which he had intended to rise that morning from his couch to transact official business.

Mingled with the buzzing in his ears, he imagined that he heard the continuous, tinkling clamor of the clock, as his pigtail was drawn tighter and tighter, and the life was strangled out of him.

He fell heavily upon his knees, his face black, his pig-eyes starting from his head. Sounds that were like snores escaped from between his leaden lips. And then he rolled to the floor, with Mark upon his chest.

"A murderer's death!" Mark got out between his teeth. "To Yen Wang, the devil-god!"

Half rising, placing a knee upon the fat man's chest, he tugged with all his strength, until, like a noisy death-watch in that heated room, the little metal bell at the top of the clock began furiously to ring.

Mark, without desisting in his grim work, swore aloud at the clock, as if it had ears to hear him. He realized that what he had declared with such assurance was now put sternly to the proof. Did he desire most life for himself or death for Ying? The alarm would be heard throughout the *fu.* To stop the ringing of the bell, he must release a hand—and Ying Taotai might breathe.

He let the clock ring on. He tugged and pulled and wrenched. And he saw death creep upon that fat, livid face like the shadow of a cloud. To Yen Wang, the devil-god, the king of a thousand Chinese fiends!

Mark Hebden got to his feet. He snatched up the clock, and dashed it in a kind of frenzied glee upon the floor. And then he fled from the room, to come face to face with an armed man in the passage.

He dived past him like a flash of light, and saw the man enter the Taotai's room. But, when at the end of the corridor he reached the window by which he had gained entrance, he stood stock-still and listened for a while to a thunderous uproar that, under the great gabled roof of the *yamen*, was like the bursting of the heavens. Within the *fu* a great gong was being sounded, beaten persistently and violently.

Mark, from the window, saw lights appear in the gateway. He heard a shout and the slamming of a door. From the guardroom on the northern side of the garden a party of armed men came clattering, with spears and swords and murderous-looking weapons that were shaped like scythes and sickles.

And yet, he waited purposely. He experienced a strange and pleasurable sensation of extreme and pressing danger, and would, like a sybarite, dwell a little longer upon a feeling as gratifying as it was novel.

He was not afraid. There was joy in his heart. Ying Taotai was dead. And Jen-te had been avenged.

It was as if the act of vaulting through the window stirred his blood, stimulating his muscles into action. He set off running down the central pathway of the garden without any notion where he was going. The gate in front of him was locked, and the guard was warned and under arms. He was surrounded by walls—walls within walls.

From all quarters of the *fu* men streamed into the moonlight in the garden, where they at once caught sight of the fugitive. A human wolf-pack, shrieking, scenting blood. Mark turned toward the only way of escape from the palace he knew of, the mandarin's garden theater.

Climbing to the platform opposite, he made several futile attempts to jump high enough to grasp the top of the wall with both hands. And by the time he had succeeded, not only were his pursuers close upon his heels, but one or two men had appeared upon the wall itself, by way of a watch-tower near the gate.

Realizing that his figure was clearly silhouetted against the sky, and that he required a few seconds in which to recover his breath, Mark crouched low and tried to think. The wall was thick—at least, a yard across the top and in good repair. In this place it divided the palace of the mandarin from the outer courtyard, but farther on it became one with the exterior wall of the whole *yamen*.

He was about to descend upon the roof of the outbuilding under the spreading branches of the mulberry-tree, when he realized that he could hope for no escape that way.

Below him, to his left, was the garden of the *fu*, where he could see shadowy figures, hastening toward the buildings that surrounded the theater, where several lights had suddenly appeared—colored, oil-paper lanterns, of all shapes and sizes, attached to bamboo poles.

To his right, he looked down into the gloomy courtyard of the *yamen*, where indeed a party of seven or eight men was to be seen hastening from the main gateway.

At that, he got to his feet, and hurried onward along the wall, not knowing where he was going or how he could escape. At the junction of the two walls, his position was more precarious than ever. He was so high above the ground that, if he jumped, he would most assuredly break his neck; the wall itself was half in ruins and no footstep was secure; and thirdly, his pursuers, still shouting, were close upon his heels.

He looked down upon one of those patches of wasteland so often to be found in the very center of Chinese cities, usually in the vicinity of palaces or temples. He had an idea if he could get to the bottom of the wall he might manage to escape, since he was by now well familiar with the city streets.

However, he had reached the angle of the wall, the extreme northwesterly corner of the Taotai's *yamen*, before he found any solution of his difficulty, though his hurried speculations were for the most part like those of a hunted fox that knows not which way to turn. If he remained upon the wall he would most certainly be captured.

The guttural cries of those who approached spurred his resolution. Rather than fall into their hands, he would throw himself head foremost from the wall. Better a broken neck than the torture these people would prepare for him.

But now, the desire to live was strong within him. The very imminence of his peril both sharpened his wits and bolstered up his courage. An idea flashed into his mind.

At the corner of the wall was a projecting gargoyle between two stone embrasures. Pen Yeh's plum-colored coat that he was wearing was of Chifu silk. It was, in any case, a chance worth taking.

He flung the coat from off him, and ripped it down the seam. Using all his strength, he then tore it into half a dozen strips, and with quick hands knotted these together, end to end.

By then, the foremost of the mandarin's retainers was not ten yards away from him. Shouting loudly and flourishing a sword, the man came forward, regardless of his life. For Mark now turned and faced him, his revolver in his hand.

The man must have seen the glitter of the barrel; for at once he threw himself down upon all fours, but continued to advance.

A single sharp report was echoed and re-echoed among the buildings in the *yamen* below; and though the shot went wide, it had the desired effect; for, not only the first man, but those who followed, hesitated for some minutes to come on. And this gave the fugitive the brief respite that he needed. He fashioned the end of his thin, silken robe into a slip-knot, and passed it over the gargoyle.

And then, down he went, hand over hand—so far as he knew, to his death. Not only had he no idea of the height of the wall, but, when no more than a few feet down, he realized that the silk itself was tearing, one of the knots was slipping, or the stone gargoyle itself was breaking from the masonry.

Suspended in mid-air, surrounded by darkness, and not knowing in the least the nature of the ground beneath him, he felt as if his heart had stopped. Breathing seemed to consist of inspiration only; a cold perspiration sprang out upon his forehead.

For all that, he continued to lower himself as swiftly as he could, at the same time looking upward at the hideous face of the gargoyle which now showed up in profile against the sky.

It represented a dragon—the fork-tongued, fiery dragon of the Middle Kingdom; and upon a sudden, the thing, like a savage beast, plunged downward, as if it hurled itself upon a defenseless victim. And Mark Hebden dropped like a stone.

THE whole thing was over in a second. Mark fell heavily; and though his right hip-bone struck soft ground, the violence of the shock jarred every bone in his body. And in the brief moment when he lay stretched at his full length, before he had time to realize that he was yet alive, the gargoyle descended like a thunderbolt, burying itself in the earth but a few inches from his head.

He jumped to his feet on the instant. Upon the wall, high above him, he could see clearly silhoutted against the steel-blue sky the figures of the infuriated Chinese, who hurled down the foulest curses at him they could not reach.

Quite suddenly Mark was conscious of his own good fortune. The breaking of the gargoyle from the wall, which had so nearly brought about his end, now proved in reality to be the actual means of his deliverance. His enemies could not descend. It would take them ten minutes, at the least, to return to the garden and pass out by the main gate; and, if by that time he had not succeeded in escaping from the city the fault would be his own.

He set off running as fast as he could, and came presently into a main thoroughfare.

Hurrying forward, he soon reached one of the city gates, through which he passed without being questioned. Out of breath though he was, he continued running, until he reached the river bank. Dawn was spreading when he came upon the *wupan* of Ah Li, lying at anchor among tall reeds that stood high above the gunwales.

Amidships, upon a mattress, lay the round-faced cherubical Ah Li, sound asleep —the slumber of one who is innocent and conscience-free.

Mark flung himself upon his friend, who clapped his hands when he saw him, just as a child might do at the sight of some pleasing toy.

"Down-stream!" cried Mark. "There is no time to lose! Ying Taotai is dead, and they are after us!' The wind is in our favor."

"Wind and water," sang the benevolent Ah Li. "As we dwell in the lap of the gods, so are wind and water the twin servants of the gods. The Great River swallows us, as the dragon swallows its young when danger is at hand."

Under full sail, and in broad daylight, they passed the Fwa-kiang, upon which stream they saw approaching, red as blood, upon its way to the city of Tong-chau, the wedding-barge.

Ah Li was in charge of the tiller of the *wupan*. But Mark Hebden sat in the bows with his face in his hands, in an attitude of prayer—though his soul cursed the East.

Leonard H. Nason

Who gave us "Chevrons" and "Souvenirs"

Tells us more about the A. E. F.

The GOLDBRICKER

ONCE upon a time on a hot July morning, three men sat in a newly dug hole in the ground. They were defenders of Democracy, come to France to throttle the German menace to all free peoples. On this particular morning, however, the German menace had the best of the argument, and the three defenders wished they were at home. They belonged to the gun crew of the third section of a fine battery of one of the finest regiments of field artillery in the A. E. F.

There was a sound as of a Fourth of July rocket reversed that ended in a tremendous grunt, such as might be made by a thousand pigs coughing simultaneously.

"Where did that one go?" asked the defenders.

They stood up and cautiously peeked over the edge of the hole to see. The woods were thick and the column of smoke from the exploded shell could not be seen. They did, however, exclaim with excitement, for a man burst from a clump of bushes and, seeing the three heads, made for them and leaped precipitately into the hole. The three recognized the newcomer as one "Shorty," liaison agent with the battalion.

"Where yuh been, Shorty?" cried the three.

Another shell rattled toward them and the four bowed their heads. The explosive content became smoke and smell, and the steel jacket, screaming junk. And when the last fragment had whined overhead, the four stood up and looked again.

"That was a near one," said a man who had been the gunner, "I can hear twigs an' stuff fallin'." Afar off in the woods a voice called, an eery, mysterious voice.

"Some one's hit," said the man who had been Number One. All listened again.

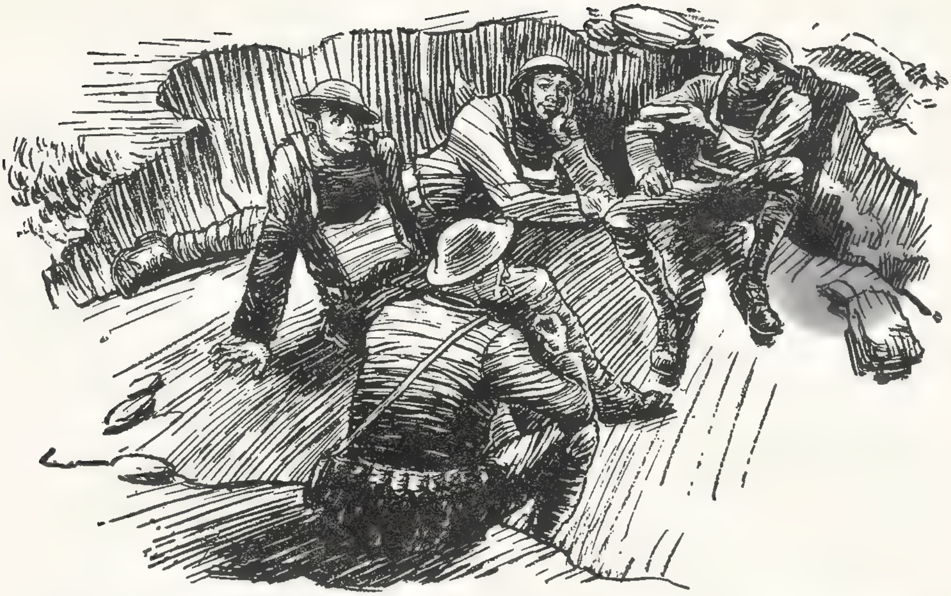
"No," said Shorty, spitting dirt he had bitten in his effort to flatten himself at the shell's first whistle, "that ain't no one hit. That's the Old Man yellin' for me. He wants me to take a message back to the battalion."

"He'll hang yuh if you don't go when he calls," said the gunner.

"I can't hear him," said Shorty.

"Well, suppose he comes lookin' for yuh? We ain't such a great ways from his dugout but what he'd know you should 'a' heard him."

"He won't come after me," said Shorty. "I know the Old Man. He'll just stand in the door and yell. Suppose one o' them rollin' kitchens comes rattlin' an' crackin' at him when he was huntin' me, an' him with no hole handy— No, sir! He won't stir foot outta the P. C. When I went in to give him the message he an' the Exec was under the bunk with a blanket over their heads. An' this is supposed to be a shootin' battery! Yuh'd think it was a bunch o' woodchucks."



"Bunch o' woodchucks!" cried the other three. "What do you suppose we been doin' all this mornin' since two A. M.?"

"Listen, now, Shorty," interrupted the gunner. "For a man that's been layin' around in the cellar over at Grand Heurtebise all night you got a lot to say. We fired an' fired like —— and when we got two pieces with direct hits on 'em, nary man left his gun. An' about six o'clock we run outta amminition. The Old Man said last week that we'd been shooting away too much stuff, just shellin' woods and lettin' drive a barrage every time some one in the observation post thought he heard a Boche pickin' his teeth, an' to prevent waste of ammo, we wouldn't have no ammo—only about fifty rounds per gun. An' so when this here ball starts, and freight cars and rollin' kitchens and G. I. cans and steam boilers begun to fall an' the doughboys put up a Fourth o' July o' rockets askin' for a barrage, we run outta shells in a pig's whisper."

"It ain't so!" said Shorty. "When we was all together in the cellar I heard the major dictating a message, an' he said that each battery had two thousand rounds, and that there wouldn't no Boche set foot on our side o' the river."

"Well, maybe so!" admitted the gunner, "but six shells a minute is 360 an hour, which, with four guns workin' is 1440 an hour, an' stuff runs out quick at that rate."

"Me," said the man who had been Number Two, "I'll say I'm glad we run out. I was asleep under the gun an' the first thing I knew I thought a truck had run into us same as it did last week. Then I thought a six-mule team was loose. Man, such a racket an' yellin'! An' you two birds don't have nothin' to do but sit on a seat an' wiggle wheels. I have to shove them shells in the gun. I counted about four hundred and lost track. I thought my arms would come out by the roots. An' then the Boche got the direct hit on Number Two an' somethin' bumped against our shield and fell down between the britch an' the wheel an' when we looked at it with the flashlight it was Sergeant Schlessinger's head."

"What did you do?" asked Shorty in the horror-stricken silence that followed.

"Nuthin'," said Number One. "We just took it away an' put a slicker over it."

"You lie like ——," said the gunner, "you shot your lunch an' couldn't work the britch-block for half an' hour afterward."

"That so?" asked Number One sarcastically. "Well, you was blubberin' an' runnin' off at the nose till after daylight."

"Ah, well," said the gunner, "to git it over with, we kept on shootin' an' the Boche kept landin' 'em at us an' they dropped one on Number Four piece, so that there wasn't nothin' left o' the crew but the section chief's hat, an' the Exec got killed an' the doctor an' two medical corps guys got killed an' Joe Toomey got his fingers caught in the gun an' by then it was daylight. The balloons could see us then, but we run outta shells pretty quick an' the Old Man says to hunt ourselves a hole. So we hunted it."

"This is a nice deep one," said Shorty, looking about him. "How'd you find it?"

"It's a latrine the machine-gunners was diggin' yesterday," said Number Two. 'It wasn't finished, thank God! It's nice an' deep an' away from the guns. They ain't botherin' us much now, though, since we quit firin'."

"They won't," said the gunner. "They got enough to do without shootin' up batteries that ain't firin'. An' so we're safe except from loose ones like they threw over a few minutes ago."

"The gravy train only runs one way today," said Shorty, "an' it's about due to stop. The message I brought over was that amminition would come up by truck before 'thirteen hours,' which means one o'clock."

"No kiddin'!" cried the other three sadly.

"If I had the nerve to go out on the road," said the gunner thoughtfully, "I'd give them trucks a wrong steer an' send 'em off somewhere where they'd strike Spain if they didn't lose courage an' turn around, but while I was waitin' for 'em I might get killed. They ain't missed droppin' 'em on the road since the fun began."

There was a swift rushing noise as of many wings beating and the men in the hole promptly lay down. A shell rushed by overhead and burst beyond them. The heads came up to see the location of the burst. The woods that way were thin and ended completely in a few yards. Beyond them was a broad field of wheat, shimmering under the heat, a field that ended at another grove of dark trees.

"I bet they're after the frogs!" said Shorty.

"Naw," replied the gunner. "The frogs been outta action as long as we have. These shells they're chuckin' around they're just amusin' themselves with. Man, there ain't a path nor a road nor a hole that don't get a G. I. can slung at it every few minutes! That's another reason why we got a good hole. It was only dug yesterday an' the Boche don't know it's here."

From the woods behind the watchers came an angry summons, punctuated with smoking profanity.

"The Old Man is yellin' for you, Shorty," said the gunner.

"I can't hear him," said Shorty. "If he thinks I can, he's got another think. I come over here from the battalion; that's enough. They're layin' 'em down on that road so that it sounds like a guy punchin' the bag. I come away around through the fields an' the balloons seen me and let drive with a creepin' barrage."

Shorty's white face went a shade whiter at the recollection.

"They gotta lotta balloons up, that's the truth," said Number Two. "When I was loadin' the gun I could peek around the shield, come daylight, an' see 'em swayin' in the wind, way over them hills. I counted ten from where I was."

Again the angry summons resounded through the woods and this time it was repeated by a number of voices.

"Shorty!" the voices cried. "Where yuh at? The cap'n wants yuh."

"What the ——'s the matter with 'em?" muttered Shorty. "I got the toughest job in the outfit, runnin' round these fields for the Boche to practise their shootin' on me an' every one o' these hole hunters is thirstin' to get me killed."

"I got a worse job than you," said Number Two. "I have to stand up all night an' I'm just far enough away from the gun shield so's it don't do me no good. Each one o' them shells weighs close to fifteen pound, so that when I get through with a night's work I've lifted near a ton. An' along about the last fifty rounds, I envy them stiffs laid out so nice and calm back o' the shell heaps. They ain't worryin' about whether their back is broke or not."

Here another shell hooted down in the woods and a sound came from the distant road, like that made by the rapid trampling of a horse over a wooden bridge. This sound continued for some time.

"They seen some troops on the road," muttered the men, "an' they're steamrollin' 'em."

"I wonder how's chances on a little chow," remarked Number One, to change the conversation into pleasanter channels.

"There ain't none," said Shorty. "When I was come by the kitchen the chow gun was cold as a stone and the cook was diggin' himself a hole. If he kept on at the rate he was goin', he's half-way to China by now. The ration dump got blowed to —— anyway."

"Lucky for me I camouflaged a doughboy's pack," said the gunner. "They shed about everything they had when they went through here last night. The last couple o' kilos they begin to get rid o' surplus weight an' one let slide his pack right where no one would see it but me. An' he had emergency rations in it—a can o' hash, hardtack, and a half-loaf o' bread."

The prospect of food at once turned every one's thoughts into pleasanter channels. When a man has not eaten for eighteen hours, even canned hash and hardtack are very appetizing. The gunner had found this pack on his way to the hole and had brought it along to examine at leisure. The can of hash was opened and the tin box of hardtack yielded its contents. The half-loaf of bread was equally divided among the four men.

"SHORTY!"

The men paused with mouths still opened to bite at the sound of that ringing shout. They all looked solemnly at Shorty; and the gunner, who was a corporal, began to wonder what his responsibility would be if Shorty was found in his company.

"Fellars," said Shorty desperately, "I never could abide this French bread without cheese. I'm goin' over to the frogs an' see if I can't buscar a little *fromage.*"

"The Boche'll see yuh crossin' the field," said Number One, "an' then the watermelons'll begin to fly."

"I'm goin'," said Shorty. "They're gettin' too anxious about me round here. If these shells let up for a while the Old Man might get up his courage an' come huntin' me."

"While you're over there," said Number Two, "see can you get a line on that system I hear they have, where two guys loads the piece. Seems to me it would be easier on a guy's back to have two doin' it."

Shorty, however, did not hear this last, for he had clambered out of the hole and, creeping cautiously to the edge of the woods, began to trot across the field. In the woods at the far side of the field was a French battery of .75's, this battery being known to the Americans as "the frogs." The frogs had also ceased firing, and the farther woods had been silent for a long time. The French at that time were better rationed than the Americans, particularly in the matter of cheese, which they, the French, would exchange for cigarets, canned tomatoes or canned beans, all of which were delicacies from the French point of view.

The men in the hole watched Shorty's tiny figure trot across the field, and when he entered the woods they breathed a sigh of relief. Either the eagle-eyed watchers in the balloons had not seen him or else had not thought him worth the trouble of a shell or two.

"Let's save our bread," said the gunner, "till he comes back and then eat the cheese on it."

"Think he'll come back?" asked Number One.

"Sure he'll come back. The Old Man'll get sick o' waitin' for him an' send some one else with his message."

"How come they're so eager to send messengers to the battalion?" asked Number Two. "Ain't they got no telephones workin'?"

"Why, where you been at all this time?" scoffed the gunner. "The telephone lines got all blowed to —— the first crack off the bat and after about half the telephone detail got bumped off tryin' to fix 'em, the Old Man said to leave 'em lay."

BRRRRRAM!

Three heads shot out of the hole.

"What the —— is that?" they cried.

On the far side of the field, before the woods, floated a faint bluish haze. There was a faint clanging as of bells, and distant shouts. Again came that rolling crash, like a clap of thunder.

"It's the frogs," said the gunner. "They've gone into action again."

The rolling crash was the simultaneous discharge of the four .75's, the clanging was the noise of the ejected shell case being tossed on to the pile of empties and the shouts were the section chiefs calling out that their pieces were ready to fire again.

BRRRRRAM!

"The Boche'll be sockin' down on them if they keep that up," observed the gunner.

"An' Shorty's over there, too," added Number One.

"Have any of you seen young Kane around here?" asked an angry harassed voice.

The three leaped to face about. There was a tall man in an officer's uniform standing at the edge of the hole. His blouse was creased and rumpled, there was a hole in the knee of his breeches and his shoulders and breast were spotted here and there with candle grease. His eyes were red, an untidy beard was sprouting, his face was pale and drawn from lack of sleep and haggard from the strain of the night. This man was the battery commander and Kane was the name by which Shorty appeared on the pay-roll.

"Don't look at me like a bunch of nuts," exclaimed the captain. "Have you seen Kane?"

"No, sir," said the three.

"—— his small soul," said the battery commander. "I've got to send a message and of course he's gone just as I want him."

The battery commander moved away out of sight.

BRRRRRAM!

Another volley, but as the empties clanged on the pile a distant sound became audible. A swift train seemed approaching—many trains. The hurrying rush and whistle of their oncoming changed to that of the thunder of a gigantic wave about to break upon the shore, and then with a roar and a bellow this grandfather of all waves crashed down upon the sand. Before the woods that sheltered the French battery a greasy, gray-black wall leaped high as if a screen had been suddenly hoisted. The three men did not see it. At the first rustle of those distant trains they had hurled themselves to the bottom of the hole.

"The Boche!" they whispered to each other. "They're gonna flatten the frogs."

The bombardment continued vigorously. The shells rushed by overhead with the sound of a gigantic flag flapping, or of the rushing of a torrent through a narrow gorge. Their explosions merged into a steady drumming. After the first few shells had passed and the men in the hole decided that the projectiles were not intended for them, they cautiously projected their heads above the edge of the hole and, peering between the tree trunks, watched the woods across the field gradually disappear in the cloud of black and yellow smoke.

"They're using gas over there," said Number Two. "See the color of it in the smoke?"

"That's mustard," agreed the gunner. "It'll hang around them woods for a week. They use it to make a position untenable. I heard the Exec say so. Even if they don't wreck everything in the place the dugouts an' gun pits an' everything'll be all full o' mustard an' the guys can't stay in 'em. I knew Jerry would bear down on them frogs if they kept on shootin'."

"They're fixin' that battery up for inspection an' no mistake," said Number One nervously. "The air is full o' wheels an' trunnions an' trail spades an' arms an' legs an' all kinds o' junk."

"Where do you suppose Shorty was when it started?" muttered the gunner.

"He must 'a' just about got there," said Number Two.

The destruction of the French battery went merrily on. A tree was seen to topple over and disappear. Flames could be seen glowing brightly through rifts in the smoke and at intervals the men could distinguish the sharp crash of exploding ammunition from the heavy growl of the shell bursts. Bits of débris were frequently flung above the tree-tops. A particularly violent explosion made the ground tremble.

"*Look out!*" cried the gunner suddenly.

The three ducked just as a shell exploded on the edge of the woods.

"I heard that one comin'," added the gunner in Number One's ear.

The three of them had cast themselves in a heap at the bottom of the hole and Number One's ear was very close to the gunner's mouth. Shells began to fall thickly in the field and the three crouched in the hole. It was too narrow for them to lie at full length. The ground shook and dirt and stones sifted down upon the men in the hole, running down their necks and tickling their ears. A piece of steel from somewhere, possibly a ricochet from a tree, clanked on the gunner's helmet. They dared not put up their heads now, for bits of shell hummed and whined across the hole with the same angry buzzing that a wasp or a bee makes when it passes with malice aforethought.

The nearness of the last shell burst showed that the bombardment had taken on a new phase, but there was no reason why the field should be shelled. There was not a dugout in it; not a path, not a telephone wire crossed it. Perhaps a new battery with its guns less exactly registered had opened fire upon the French; perhaps some German officer, intending to lengthen the range had miscalculated and shortened it instead.

Then suddenly, with a completeness that

spoke of perfect fire control, the bombardment stopped. It was as if an orchestra leader had waved his baton. Silence. The three waited a few seconds, then exposed their helmets and eyes above the edge of the hole. All seemed safe. They gradually stood up and looked through the trees toward the French battery. The field was speckled with shell holes, the trees of the farther woods seemed frayed and torn, and smoke still curled slowly from amid their branches. Then the silence was broken by that most horrible of sounds, the cries of the wounded.

Far off across the distant wheat fields the three could see ambulances hurrying as near as they could get to the position of the shattered battery. Men began to run out of the trees and across the field, and stretcher bearers, recognizable by the instruments of their profession carried on their shoulders like furled banners, began to cross the fields and disappear into the woods that hid what remained of the frogs. The three in the hole watched wordlessly. At last one spoke.

"Shorty was a good lad after all," muttered Number Two.

"That's right," agreed the gunner. "He was always ready to stake a guy to a little game o' crap an' if he had a drop o' coneyac in his canteen he'd share it with yuh. It's always the good lads that get bumped off. Look at them that got theirs last night! All white men! An' not a wop or a bohunk in the lot gets a scratch!"

"The wops an' the bohunks got sense enough to get underground when things start," said Number Two. "All they do is dig latrines an' do cooks' police an' when a fight's goin' on they ain't got no duty but keepin' outta sight."

"It's too bad Shorty was such a young fellar," remarked Number One. "Now if he'd only been a bit older he'd had a razor. Since the night I loaned mine to the first sergeant an' he left it out in the rain it ain't been o' much account, an' here'd be a chance to get a new one."

"He's got a razor," said Number Two. "Why, he's got a half dozen or so. When we was at Kokydawn the Red Cross issued out razors an' Shorty told the girl that he had a lot o' sick buddies in hospital an' could she give him the razors for 'em an' he was such a innocent lookin' kid with them blue eyes an' red cheeks o' his that she give 'em to him an' give him a kiss, too, the little son!"

"What for would he want so many razors?" asked the gunner.

"Why, he was keepin' 'em to sell when he got to the front, figurin' that the guys would lose theirs."

"Umm," said Number One, "where was Shorty's dugout?"

"He slept over at the battalion," said the other.

Number One sighed heavily and turned again to watch the stretcher bearers coming out now with their burdens. The bearers worked fast and nervously, for the bombardment might start again at any moment. The men in the hole strained their eyes to try to see whether they could distinguish any of the men on the stretchers, but it was impossible. They watched eagerly, but the bearers seemed to be soon finished. The last of them trotted away, the smoke ceased to curl and all was calm and peaceful once more, with only the new shell holes in the field and the white wounds of the shattered tree-limbs to show what had happened.

"Well, let's finish our dinner," said Number One, sitting down in the hole with his back against the side. "We can be thankful it wasn't us."

The three soldiers turned about and rested their backs against the wall of the hole. They looked gloomily at the yellow can of hash, at the tiny squares of hardtack of a steel-like consistency and at the half of a round loaf of French army bread. The gunner opened the hash with the can opener on the back of his pocket knife and sniffed at the contents. Then he put the can solemnly on the ground in the center of the group.

"Dig in," he invited.

The others made no movement.

"I ain't got no appetite," finally remarked Number Two.

The silence of the others showed agreement.

There was a dense stillness over all the countryside now. No shell whooped, no airplane boomed, no voice called. The three men in the hole had had no sleep, they had had no food and the strain of their first battle and of their first acquaintance with sudden and untidy death was beginning to react on them. They sat wordlessly staring at the toes of their hobnails. A sudden shower of dirt cascaded into the open can of hash, there was a thud, and a man leaped into the hole.

"Where the —— do you think you are?" demanded the gunner, and then his tone changed suddenly to one of astonishment. "Why, it's Shorty!" he cried. "We thought you was dead!"

"Not me," said Shorty, "but I'll bet I'm the sole survivor."

He sat down and heaved a sigh of relief. His white face was a shade whiter than it had been before, his eyes held just a hint of stark terror and his uniform was badly torn.

"Well, Shorty!" cried Number One. "By ——, I'm glad to see you again. How come your clothes got all torn up? Was you there all through it? Did they wreck that battery? Man, it looked to us like there wouldn't be a toothpick left of it!"

"I'll say I was there through all of it," exclaimed Shorty. "I just got in when I heard the first load comin'. There was a hole right handy and I went in it. The frogs come in on top of me. That's how my clothes got torn, they was all scratchin' to get at the bottom. An' we didn't stop to match pennies either."

"Did the Boche wreck the place?" asked the gunner.

"I'll say!" answered Shorty. "Two of the guns is upset and the other got a wheel took right off at the roots an' most of their amminition caught fire an' burned up. They had it in little dumps like we do, so when it blew it didn't do much harm. I didn't see much that went on because I was in the hole, and I'll tell the incregulus world that I was busy enough stayin' on the bottom. There was great scramblin' goin' on all the time, but I stayed. If a shell had come in that hole it would have had to go down through six feet o' interwoven frogs before it got to me. When it got calm I come out. There's nothin' left there but stiffs. When the shootin' was over them that could run lit out o' there, I ain't kiddin' yuh! An' if you'd seen me you'd thought the rest of 'em was standin' still."

"Well," said Number One, "that's a interestin' account. First you duck outta here an' just as we get thinkin' we're well rid o' yuh you come plungin' back. Look at where you got our hash full o' dirt!"

"So it is!" said Shorty, picking up the can of hash and inspecting it. "Well, that stuff ain't no more good." He hurled the can over the edge of the hole into the woods.

"Hey! Hey!" cried the men in the hole. They struggled to find adequate words.

"Leggo my neck!" cried Shorty. "You don't need to eat hash. I brung you some cheese."

"Ah!" said the men.

They looked with eager eyes as Shorty displayed a bundle that he had in his hand. It was a triangular object wrapped in brown paper which he unrolled and displayed to the admiring eyes of the men as a large morsel of white cheese.

"There's plenty for all of us," said Shorty.

"Shorty, you're a good lad—there ain't none better," remarked the gunner. "I'd rather see you come back from that battery alive than have a case o' coneyac give to me."

The four men sat down in the bottom of the hole and arranging and interlacing their feet so that they would be as comfortable as possible—the hole was small for four—they proceeded to spread the cheese on the bread and eat. Their appetites had returned with Shorty.

"Has the Old Man been botherin' around after me?" asked Shorty while he spread himself another slice of bread.

"He come bellerin' around," said the gunner, "but we said we hadn't seen you. He had a hunch you was off goldbrickin' somewhere, but since the bombardment he ain't said a word."

"Maybe he's scared speechless," suggested Number One. "Man, this is good cheese! Pass me the bread. How'd you have the luck to hook on to a piece of cheese in all that excitement?"

"Well, I was headin' for the cook shack when it started," said Shorty, "an' when it was over I wasn't but a few feet from the place, so I thought I'd just take a look and see if there was anything I could put my hand on. There was some nice wine there, but it was broke. So then—"

"*Yipe!*" interrupted the gunner.

He spat violently and then explored his mouth with hurrying fingers.

"Man, looka this!" he cried. "Why, I near swallered a railroad spike!"

He drew out of his mouth what looked like a long splinter of wood.

"Man, when I crunched down on that I near broke my jaw!"

"Did it cut yuh?" asked Number One solicitously.

"No, but I near drove it clean through my skull."

The gunner explored the roof of his mouth with his thumb.

"No, I ain't cut," he decided.

"Yes, you are," said Number Two. "You're bleedin'. Look at your hunk o' bread!"

The gunner looked down in astonishment. In the whiteness of the cheese was a rusty streak. He looked dumbly back at the sliver he had taken from his mouth. The shell hole was small and the men could all lean over and see what the gunner had in his hand. It looked somewhat like a sliver of wood, but it looked more like bone.

"Shorty," said the gunner, in a threatening voice, "what the —— is all this?"

"It ain't nothin'," cried Shorty desperately. "That frog cook was kinda strewn around and some of him was on the cheese, but I thought I wiped it all off. Now listen, you fellars—"

There was a slight scrambling sound as three pairs of feet were drawn up to heave their owners upright. Six hands reached for Shorty, but the hands stopped midway of their destination. A new sound had broken the stillness of the woods, the long shrilling blasts of many whistles, the shouts of men and the coughing roar of heavy motors.

"It's the amminition trucks!" breathed the gunner.

Another whistle shrilled close at hand and the Celtic accents of the first sergeant rang through the trees.

"Everybody up!" he cried. "Here's the amminition! Everybody up to lug shells, non-coms an' ahll! Roll out, ye goldbricks, outta thim holes, before ye feel the flat o' me foot!"

"Now ——!" muttered Number One sadly. He could hear the lurch and crack of the first truck and the bellowing of its driver as it came down the narrow road through the woods. "The first shot we fire the Boche'll lay down on us like they did on the frogs and after that—*fineesh!* Thank God I ain't married!"

"An' think o' me," added Number Two, "after luggin' shells all the afternoon to have to put 'em into the gun all night! A man liftin' six o' them shells a minute lifts a ton o' weight in a night's shootin'. An' me workin' right over the amminition dump that's liable to blow up any minute!"

Again the first sergeant exhorted and other non-coms added their voices to his. The rumble of the trucks was very close now.

"Well, fellars," said Shorty comfortably, "I'm a liaison man—I must be gettin' back to the battalion. There's probably work for me to do there."

"Come, men, jump out of that," broke in a stern voice, "We want to be ready to fire in twenty minutes."

All looked up. Again the captain stood at the edge of the hole, but this time his eye lighted upon Shorty.

"Oh, there you are, Kane," said he with his voice of cold-rolled steel. "Where were you when I was looking for you a little while ago?"

"I was over to the frogs," said Shorty. "I just stepped over there for a little piece of cheese."

"Hmm," said the captain. "I had a message I wanted to send. I couldn't find you so I sent Tewzik with it. You'll have to stay and take his place with the battery. Hurry now, jump out and lend a hand!"

"What's this here Tewzik do?" asked Shorty sadly as the four scrambled out of the hole.

"He's Number Two of the first piece," replied the grinning gunner.

The World's Wildest Woman

An Article

By H. H. Dunn

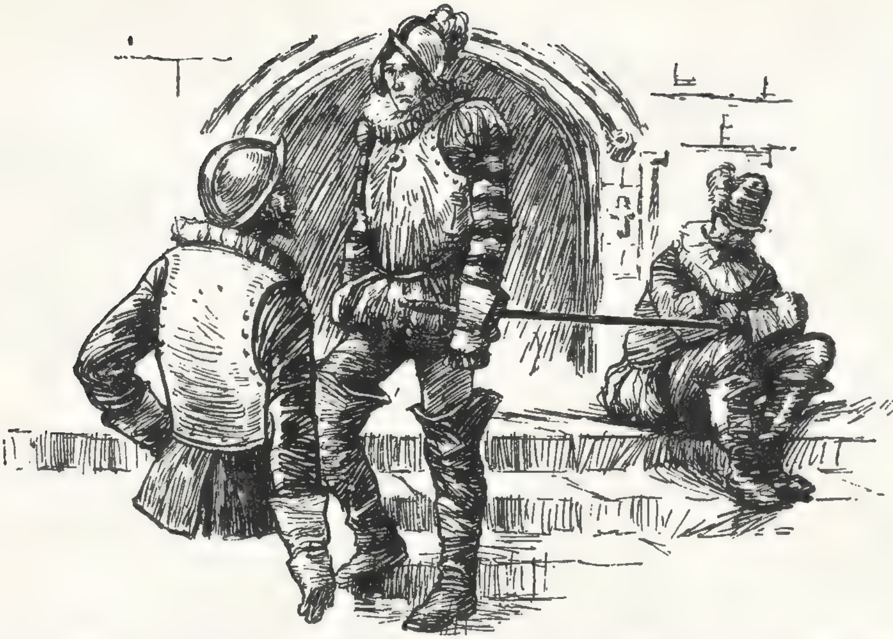
MOST soldiers of fortune, from Ulysses on down to Lee Christmas, have been satisfied with one continent, or at most two, for their operations. But there was a woman, born about three hundred and fifty years ago, whose rapier and pistols carried her through South America, part of North America, and much of Europe. So cleverly did she disguise herself as a man that she fought side by side with her own brother in several battles in the Americas without revealing not only that she was his sister, but even that she was other than she professed to be—a swashbuckling young male adventurer.

She was born, probably between 1585 and 1590, in San Sebastian, in the maritime province of Guipuzcoa, in northern Spain, becoming by the accident of birth a Biscayan Basque; and by christening Catalina de Erauso. Because she had been placed in a convent, with the intention of making her a member of one of the sisterhoods, she is better known in history and legend throughout the Spanish-speaking countries as "La Monja Alfarez"—the nun ensign.

Though there is much of myth surrounding her name, there is now no doubt that she really lived, fought through a dozen sanguinary engagements in her more than a score of years as a roving blade, and that she died about 1650 at Cuitlaxtla, Mexico, while on her way to Vera Cruz, where she was at the time engaged in the business of operating pack trains of mules between the Gulf Coast port and Mexico City. She must have been at least sixty years old at the time of her death, and though she had been seriously wounded on several occasions, was "of good body, no little flesh, brown in color; with some small hairs by way of mustache," according to Joaquin Maria de Ferrer, in his "Historia de la Monja Alfarez, Doña Catalina de Erauso," published in Paris about 1829.

Though there are claims that the celebrated Catalina was not born until 1592, it appears to be established that she was placed in the convent of San Sebastian el Antiguo, in San Sebastian, either in 1602 or 1603. She fled this convent in the spring of 1607, and the woman, Catalina de Erauso, thereupon disappears for nearly twenty years, being replaced by one "man," bearing several names, and cutting and shooting "his" way through South America, Mexico and southern Europe. Quite naively, in her own history, as edited by Ferrer and mentioned above, Catalina describes her adventures, and there is every reason to believe that her story is true, even to the details of names and dates.

Fleeing from the convent by night, Catalina, then probably about seventeen years of age, and certainly not more than twenty, hid herself in a thicket until she



could convert her habit into a passable suit for a boy. This she did with scissors, needle and thread stolen from the convent. Here, also, she cut her hair short, and, with the help of certain moneys stolen from the convent, she proceeded to Vitoria, where she obtained work. Thence she continued to work and steal her way to Valladolid, where she took the name of Francisco Loyola—the first of her aliases of which she makes mention. Each of her positions was held only until she could earn, or steal, enough to carry herself to another town.

At length, she reached San Lucar, where she joined herself with one Captain Miguel de Echazarreta, who appears also to have been a Basque, and who was in command of one of the ships in a fleet sailing for Punta de Araya, and thence to Cartagena, in the Indies. On this voyage, she became cabin boy for her mother's first cousin, but he did not recognize her, and, at Nombre de Dios, she fled the ship, taking, as she admits, five hundred pesos belonging to him.

Thence the young woman, still disguised and unrecognized, went to Panama, working for various men of note, and finally accompanying one of them, in the capacity of secretary, to Paita; thereafter going, in charge of this merchant's store, to Saña, where her real life of fighting began. Here she became involved in a duel, slashing her adversary's face, and wounding his companion. Thereupon she fled to Trujillo, still in the employ of the same merchant whither her opponent in the fight at Saña followed her and renewed the battle. One of his companions she wounded, and escaped prosecution by fleeing into the cathedral, then a place of refuge. From there she fled to Lima, capital of Peru, where she obtained a position with a wealthy merchant, only to be discharged a few months later because, as he said, she "had been trifling with the affections" of a younger sister of his wife!

At Lima she enlisted in the Peruvian army, which was being sent to Chile, and at Concepción came face to face with her brother, Captain Miguel de Erauso, secretary to the governor. Learning that the new soldier also was from San Sebastian, the young captain, knowing nothing of her identity or sex, obtained permission to transfer his sister to his own company. Soon, however, she quarrelled with this brother, who accused her of undue familiarity with his sweetheart, and brother and sister were going at it merrily with rapiers when they were separated by mutual friends.

Catalina fled to Paicabi, where she fought Indians incessantly for three years. In one of these battles she recaptured the Peruvian flag, which had been taken by the Indians, killing a *cacique* and some of his bodyguard in doing it. In retrieving the banner, the nun ensign received "a nasty wound in the leg," was "pierced by three arrows, and with a lance wound in the shoulder, which gave great pain," all of which confined her to camp for nine months. During this period she was reunited with her brother, and was made an "ensign" in the Peruvian army of occupation (Spanish) as a reward for her "distinguished bravery." She here had assumed the name of "Diaz."

She remained in this part of the country for five years. Meanwhile, the captain of the company with which she was connected died, and she took command, retaining it for six months, during which time she had several encounters with the enemy and received a number of wounds from arrows. Ill-fortune seemed to follow the female ensign, for having captured a prominent chief of the Indians, she hanged him out of hand, instead of turning him over alive to the governor. The latter, enraged, refused to give her a captaincy, but placed another soldier in charge of the company. The Doña Catalina then obtained a transfer to the military post at Concepción, and remained there some months, until she became involved in a fight in a gambling house, in which she wounded several men, including the chief justice of the community, whom she stabbed in the cheek so severely that he ultimately died of his wound. Another of her opponents, an ensign in her own company, also died as a result of a thrust from the rapier of the female soldier of fortune.

Fleeing into a church, she escaped the immediate consequences of her outburst of temper, but, after being there a few weeks, she slipped out one night to serve as a second to a close friend in a duel. This combat soon became a foursome, in which her friend, his enemy and that enemy's second were killed. The light of the next day, when Catalina was back safe in the church, proved that one man whom she had engaged and killed was her brother, Captain Miguel de Erauso. After this escapade, friends provided her with money and a horse, and she fled to Ticuman. On the way, she fell in with two men, also going to Ticuman. Both these men died from the effects of cold, exposure and hunger on the long, hard journey. She robbed both bodies of all they possessed, and eventually arrived in the Vale of Ticuman, where she was rescued by the servants of an Indian widow, owner of an extensive hacienda, and possessed of a a daughter, "black and ugly as the devil." The widow made Catalina manager of her estates and proposed "his" marriage with the daughter, moving her whole establishment to Ticuman, to celebrate the approaching nuptials. Meanwhile, in Ticuman, she became acquainted with the vicar-general, who had a daughter, and this prelate proposed that the soldier of fortune marry this "wench of most striking attractions and a good dowry." Collecting all the gifts she could from both these would-be parents-in-law, Catalina, to use her own expression, "doubled the Cape and vanished."

As a matter of fact, she fled to Potosi, something like 1200 miles, having a battle with *ladrones* on the way, in which two of the robbers were killed. After this, she served as a sheep-herder, and as a soldier in the local militia, and so conducted herself that she was appointed sergeant-major at Potosi, and held this office for two years. Then the Indians of Los Chunchos and El Dorado rose in arms, and the governor of the district collected troops to go against them. These troops Catalina de Erauso joined, but after fighting for about six months, deserted because the governor would not allow her to search for gold, as she and a number of companions asked leave to do.

To escape the results of this desertion, she went to La Plata, where she speedily became involved in a quarrel between the wives of two men prominent in the community, and was sentenced to ten years' service in Chile, without pay, on a charge of having cut with a knife the face of one of the ladies mentioned. Eventually, she was released, however, and took to flight again, bound for Las Charcas, where she once more became a sheep-herder, but this time in control of ten thousand "sheep of burden," i.e., *llamas*. Here the nun ensign fell into a quarrel in a gambling house again, killed the man, and fled by night to Piscobamba. In this community, she once more became involved in a rapier-fight with a gambler, in which the latter was killed. For this she was tried, sentenced to be hanged, and carried to the gallows, but while the executioner was adjusting the rope, reprieve came from officials at La Plata, and she was released, going to Cochibamba.

There, she fell in with one of the most interesting incidents of her vivid career. Passing the house of one of the grandees she was appealed to by the wife of this official for aid. It appeared that the said official had caught his wife in the arms of a nephew of the Bishop, and had killed the young man. Meanwhile, the wife had fled, and the husband was now searching for her, with loud promises to kill her immediately. The Doña Catalina lifted the fleeing woman to the back of her mule and set out at top speed for La Plata. The husband pursued, but the mule proved surer footed and longer winded than his horse, and the pair escaped to a convent in the outskirts of La Plata, to which Catalina delivered her lady.

On the street in La Plata, the able Catalina encountered an enemy, who immediately made at her with his rapier. She defended herself and so conducted the fighting that it was carried into a church, where, at the foot of the altar, she "drove the rapier a hand's breadth into his side." After this, she lay hidden in a near-by monastery for five months, while her enemy's wound healed. During this period she learned that the man she had wounded was none other than the husband of the woman she had carried to the nunnery. When the case came to trial, the Doña Catalina was released and husband and wife both entered the church. For a brief period after this she became a special agent of the governor, but this life was too quiet for her and she resigned and went to La Paz.

One of the residents of this community was so ill-advised as to call the nun ensign a liar, and paid for it with his life at the point of her dagger. Here she was again sentenced to death, but, having been taken into the cathedral for confession and communion, she appealed to the church for refuge, and it was granted to her by the Lord Bishop. In this church, she remained a month, finally escaping to Cuzco, where a midnight murder, in which it appears she had no part, kept her in jail for five months. On being released she fled to Lima arriving there in the midst of an attack upon that city by the Dutch.

In this battle, she was captured, and, after about a month, put ashore at Paita, some three hundred miles from Lima, to which she eventually returned, suffering many hardships on the way. Finding Lima unremunerative to an adventurer of her ability, she soon left to return to Cuzco. No sooner had she set foot in that ancient capital of the Incas, however, than she became involved in a quarrel at a gaming table, in which she killed her opponent, and was so sorely wounded herself that she revealed her sex to the priest who came to receive her confession. She was ill of her wounds four months, during which time the priest appears to have remained silent as to her being a woman, and on her recovery fled for Guamanga, which she eventually reached after passing through two fights, and making successful theft of a fine horse.

Running true to her past record, the Doña Catalina proceeded to get herself into a fight almost immediately on reaching Guamanga, the result of which was that she was taken in charge by the bishop, who eventually placed her in a convent, after she had admitted her sex to him. Here for the first time in nearly fifteen years, she put on the habits of a nun, and appears to have been made much of, despite her murders, thefts and other crimes, by the dignitaries of church and state. Within a year, owing to the condition of her health, she removed from the convent to Teneriffe, whence she went to Cartagena and thence to Spain, on the flagship of the Spanish fleet. This, according to Ferrer's edition of her book, was in 1624, but this date is in doubt.

In her history, the Doña Catalina tells of having kissed the foot of Pope Urban VIII, who gave her permission to continue wearing men's clothing, and she was inscribed on the rolls as a Roman citizen. But, though she seems to have wandered over Europe—at least along the shores of the Mediterranean—for some time, possibly not seeking trouble but never evading it, her adventurous heart was in the New World, and we next find her on board ship, bound for either Coatzacoalcos, the port at which Cortez had landed more than one hundred years before, or Vera Cruz. In any event, she at last made her way to the City of the True Cross, and either so altered her mode of life that she no longer sought quarrels, or had such influence that she was able to keep out of trouble with the authorities. There she became a packer, owner of large mule-trains and employer of several hundred *cargadores*, and in that section of Mexico she died. Though she had confessed to priest and pope, according to her own history, that she never had been married, and never had had a lover, there is a family in Mexico which claims descent from her on the distaff side of the house.

Gordon Young

Continues his New *Romance of the* South Seas

TREASURE

LIANFO was a copra port. The steamer came but once a month, when it came regularly, which was not usual. So, not hearing much of the outside world, the inhabitants chattered over and over of the small happenings in their midst.

Three men were lying on the beach, facing the dark water. One of these men was Old Bill Barnes, bearded and talkative as a parrot, as full of repetition. Another was Old Tom Wateman, thin, small, bandy-legged; a crabbed man with red-rimmed eyes. The other was a lazy young beachcomber by the name of Raeburn, Jack Raeburn. For a long time they had been shipmates on the *Dragon*, a black-hulled schooner: Will Heddon, master.

Heddon stood above six feet, was wide of shoulders and heavy of fists; he hated the islands, natives, climate, but loved the sea, and the wild, tricky life of an island dodger.

He once had business dealings with a man named Walscher, one of the rich men of Lianfo. Of course Walscher got the better of him. This later led to Heddon's flattening him out. But he soon learned that on Lianfo a rich man's flesh could not be abused. Magistrate Davies—"Porpoise Davy," Heddon called him—was Walscher's good friend. Walscher, being a business man, cast an eye on Heddon's schooner. It was libeled—attached.

The three seamen were talking of this attachment and of T'eeay Layeen, the Chinese pirate. A remarkable fellow, people said. Tall and dark-eyed, with the look of royalty in his bearing; possessor of great treasure, too. But then, Heddon was said to know of an island of treasure, the existence of which he would neither affirm nor deny. People called him a "deep 'un."

Denasso, the opium-smoking musician of a miserable troupe of show people who were stranded on Lianfo, came to Heddon with a message. Vioux, their manager—who was completely dominated by his snake-charmer, Madame, and Abdul the Human Bull, a strong man—was in trouble. He had brought a Chinese slave-girl, Po-Shu, to the island and now Porpoise Davy had her. Heddon asked where they had found her.

"Madame found her in Sydney," said Denasso, smilingly. "How or where I don't know. Really don't. It doesn't matter. Lovely child, Po-Shu, what?"

Vioux said:

"My daughter, monsieurs, by my firs' wife. Ah, a marveelous woman, my firs' wife!"

There were Chinese who wanted her, too. So Vioux gave Heddon a great diamond he had stolen from Madame, as a price to kidnap Po-Shu and take them all to the mainland. Heddon pounded the thick bottom of an empty gin bottle on a piece of scrap iron, threw the glass into a chamois sack with the diamond, and persuaded Walscher to accept security for his lien on the *Dragon*, giving him the one diamond. Talk of Heddon's treasure was revived, and men of the beach planned to stow away on the *Dragon* when she sailed.

That night Magistrate Davies was dozing on his porch, when the kidnapers arrived. Heddon tried to talk him into giving up the girl. Insults and reason, logic and jeers, meant nothing to Porpoise Davy. When he was finally tied up, his timid wife, begging mercy for him, led them to Po-Shu's room.

A gust of wind through an open window set shadows dancing as the flame flickered.

"Po-Shu? Po-Shu?" Denasso called coaxingly. Heddon, holding the lamp high in one hand, turned to the bed and bent over it.

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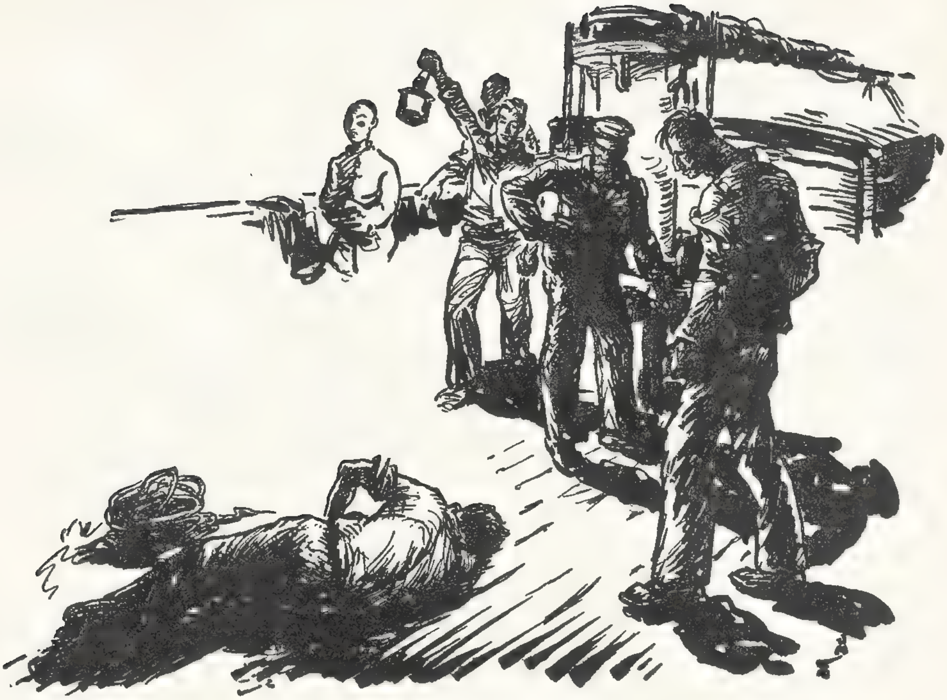


"She's gone!" he said. "Been gone—the bed's cold! Looks like the Chinks got her."

So they laid Mrs. Davies on the cot, tying her down with strips of torn sheeting. She understood their need of time in their getaway and was thankful that they had not hurt her husband.

"We'll leave him high and dry," promised Heddon. As they lurched through the darkness, Heddon shouted:

"We've some luck anyhow, Jack! There'll be wind enough for our hurry."

Once aboard the ship, after fighting through the rain and bluster of that storm-swept night, the men were turned to. Even Abdul was forced to the capstan, though Heddon had to knock him out first. After a tense half-hour the schooner was put over the bar, in pursuit of the Chinese ship thought to carry Po-Shu.

Vioux and Madame questioned Will Heddon about his knowledge of treasure. He told them:

"See here! If I knew of treasure, would I bang and bat about in these islands, stealing shell an' doing a tramp's odd jobs when with little more than the glint of gold one could live at ease in, say, Paris? You're all fools over that treasure yarn. If there'd been a smell of treasure I'd have dug for it long ago."

Then a sudden uproar broke out on the deck above; the stowaways were out! A fierce fight took place for possession of the *Dragon*, ending with Heddon and his crew in charge of a wrecked schooner—topmast, foresail and jig in a jumble on deck. Pelew, ringleader of the beach gang, walked aft to Will Heddon and said—

"Nothin' left to fight for, mister, but a dismasted tub as won't sail."

"You'll all get to the pumps," said Heddon. "The boats are smashed and we've got to keep afloat as long as possible."

Madame's great snake, Baal-Phelgor, had the entire crew in terror. Heddon kept his distance with the rest and ordered that no one molest the reptile.

The following morning dawn came with a murky glow, filtering through the rain. Walscher's *Jack-Girl* was expected to show up and carry them back to Lianfo and prison, but the first thing sighted was a long-boat. Pelew, in the shrouds with binoculars, suddenly shouted:

"Look! By——, they're Chinks! Looks like we had a new lot of pumpers comin' aboard!"

As they drew near, a tall, finely built Chinese was seen in the stern—steering and sculling. The boat pulled alongside and Madame, at the rail, screamed:

"Po-Shu! In the boat there. You will see!"

Denasso was putting in a plea for the protection of the slave-girl from Vioux and Madame when his gaze was drawn shoreward. The *Jack-Girl* was bearing out from Lianfo.

Heddon quickly laid plans for his followers, saying to Old Bill:

"You and Tom can't face prison. You must turn witness against me, understand?"

"Me? Me and Tom! Turn agin ye, Will 'Eddon? Not to save yer worthless soul from —— we wouldn't!"

And the lazy young Raeburn was just as indignant.

With a frown Heddon turned to watch the Chinese coming aboard. Po-Shu was handed over the side and ran to him, sheltering from Madame's wrath at his side. Will called to the tall Chinese:

"You savvy me talkee? This *nu-ken*. What for you stealum her?"

With but a slight accent the answer came:

"To me was given a ship and men if I would take her from a house. It was the ship, not this woman, that I wanted. The ship sank—"

Denasso drew Raeburn to one side and whispered—

"That Chink—Po-Shu just told me—*T'eeay Layeen* "

Raeburn, astonished at this new development, rejoined Heddon with the hope of warning him. They were planning to capture the *Jack-Girl*, and Heddon proposed that they turn the snake on Walscher.

Soon the *Jack-Girl* hailed them and sent her boat to take them off. The snake, securely boxed, went with Madame. The next boat-load carried Heddon, who, in the ensuing fight, was chiefly concerned with keeping Pelew from killing any one. As it turned out, the snake was not loosed, as Madame protested so strongly that she lost her wig in the tussle. She ran to hide her shame in a cabin, dodging the struggling men.

The Chinese, T'eeay Layen, fought with a knife, wary as a cat, and seemed everywhere at once. The fight was fierce, but brief, and soon the *Jack-Girl's* crew threw down their weapons in surrender and stood dejectedly in the rain.

After settling affairs on their new craft, T'eeay Layeen and Heddon came to an understanding. T'eeay had promised Pelew and the men that he would lead them to treasure, and the Chinese, fearing treachery from the crew, ordered his coolie attendants to watch over Heddon constantly.

Two nights had passed when the *Rose Marie*, a labor-recruiting schooner, hove into hearing. The impetuous Pelew jumped to the rail and shouted:

"We're pirates, you ol' nigger-catcher! An' here's Say Lean, the Chink pirate!"

So when the captain of the *Rose Marie* had taken Walscher and the others aboard he opened fire with rifles, while Heddon and Pelew drove the men aloft. A sudden squall split the schooner's main-sail and carried the bark to safety.

Old Bill, badly wounded in the first fight, was cheerfully being nursed by all. Old Tom was even carving him crutches, though not much hope was held for his recovery.

The chink's treasure was the chief topic talked of among the crew.

Late that afternoon Heddon came to Old Tom with word that Madame had regained her wig and was once more on deck.

"The minute I saw her I went to throw her *babee*, Baal-Phelgor, overboard. Thank God, her door was locked! When I looked through a port I saw he was loose. Guess she's looking for some one to feed to the —— snake!"

Madame was indeed touched to the quick by the discovery of her baldness, and her next move was to flatter Pelew into serving her ends.

The crew began to talk of a Jonah, came to believe that the snake was it. Storms lashed the ship; a fire broke out in the hold; and by the time T'eeay Layeen gave them directions to Kyo Island, where the treasure lay, there seemed to be little chance of their ever reaching it.

Pelew and Madame hoped to seize the ship when treasure was found, but the crew was getting away from Pelew's dominance, and soon they ran into a windless stretch of sea where they were practically becalmed.

"This —— ship is jonered. Jonered!" said the men forward, and grew angered as they said it.

With cunning Madame regained the confidence of Vioux, getting him to steal Denasso's opium. The poor drug-slave, coerced to do murder at Madame's behest, chose to jump overboard.

Heddon and T'eeay Layeen came to admire one another's courage and honesty. Will warned him of torture:

"I'd have nothing to do with the treasure scheme. But the men know you won't give up all you have without persuasion."

T'eeay, secure in his knowledge of hundreds of followers of Kyo Island, changed the subject:

"Little Po-Shu wants to be yours. You have her heart, and her heart is a great treasure."

"What would I do with her? I don't want her! snapped Heddon.

Things came to a head a few days later when the crew came aft and demanded that the snake be thrown overboard. Heddon agreed in spite of Madame's pleas. Finally she ran to her cabin as if to guard Baal-Phelgor.

That night Old Bill died.

The next morning, while Heddon was on watch, the snake attacked Pelew on deck, Will leaped into the struggle, revolver in hand, and the slimy beast threw them both about the deck like straws before the wind. Abdul took a hand in the fight, clasping the python's throat in a grip that did not loosen until the men, with axes, had severed the head and cut the constricting folds of snake from Abdul's body—then he sank back, crushed internally, to die in terrible pain.

The huge Abdul was buried with the head of Baal-Phelgor in his shroud, Heddon reading the service; and the crew stood bareheaded and silent.

With the death of the snake the Jonah seemed to be gone, and a steady breeze drove them along on their course. Madame was no longer the same Madame; she never stirred from her room. Something within her had died with her pet.

THE bark raised land to starboard and land to port and at times passed so close as to seem within hailing distance of high mountainous islands, covered with jungle-tangle. Once the bark hung under the low-blown smoke of a volcano, but this was not T'eeay Layeen's fire-mountain; twice it crossed the bows of small proas, with great lanteen sails seemingly upside down. The proas swung close while small, half-naked men stared. Once a huge junk bobbed out of the dawn, but the bark fled like a low-flying swallow.

"Friend o' yours, that fellow?" Heddon asked of T'eeay Layeen who, with expressionless attention, kept lifting the glass.

"The friend of no man. It is a war junk, and has been blown to sea to be so far from other ships. If not careful it may find the T'eeay Layeen it looks for."

A few nights later, near midnight, the sea lay almost flat under the brilliant starlight and the breeze was as lazy as a drowsy boy. The deck was quiet and forward, men were sleeping as if to make up for lost hours. Even the man at the wheel seemed half asleep. Heddon spoke to him sharply; then, after pacing back and forth for a time, leaned on the rail and looked heavenward. The stars seemed dangling on threads that had been let down much nearer than ever before toward the earth.

Forward a man screamed, and such was the quietness of the hour that Heddon heard the flop of the fallen body as it struck water. He stretched himself far over the rail, in one breath crying, "Man overboard—down helm! Down!"—gesturing frantically with a hand behind him.

A voice forward took up the cry and a smothered agonizing sound, more a groan than a shout, came up from the water, and below, Heddon saw a dark form sliding past, outlined by the phosphorescent sparkle as it bobbed about the surface.

Heddon jumped. The sea was such that no man need greatly care whether he was on deck or overboard, as long as his going overboard was known to the ship; but the outcry of this man had been like the frightened scream of one who could not swim.

Heddon, a powerful fellow, could swim like a porpoise. And almost before the bark had passed a stone's throw by him he had laid hand on the man; but the man appeared already drowned.

"Come on! Can't you swim?"

A vague choked gurgle; just that and no other answer. The body lay limply adrift.

"Scared to death, eh! You yelled like it. Now —— you, face about here and be a man!"

He clutched the fellow by the hair, lifting his head, shaking him savagely. A low strangled groan seemed to bubble up through a throat full of water.

"You can't have drowned that quick!" Heddon told him, and holding the man by the hair, lay over on his side and with a reaching one-handed stroke started for the bark, to where it had come aback a quarter of a mile or less away. He knew the boat would be lowered and come for him; and now and then he paused and gave a long-drawn shout of "A-hoy-oh!" that the boat might be guided. And like an echo there came back to him Old Tom's high-pitched "Hoy-oh!"

Sparkles rippled about him as if all the pirate gold ever lost at sea had been wrought by mermen jewelers into spangles for the watery robes of sea maidens. It was a mild quiet night, with a spiced breeze barely touching the water; low stars dangled brilliantly, below him lay a mile's depth of ocean; and the not unfamiliar thought burst upon him: "How very small a thing is man!" And a moment later: "Aye! I'd be no more than a little polyp for a big shark right now. Shark comes, I'll feed him this fellow first!"

He gave a backward glance at the limp body he pulled along; then stopped and treading water, raised the man's face a little, pushed away the wet hair, peered hard, and after a moment in which his eyes seemed refusing to detect anything familiar in that watery face, Heddon suddenly realized that this was the seaman Haskell, and he was dead.

"What the ——, and how! Aye, the best men go first—that's why the world's so full of rotters! Here's the devil to pay—or rather paid. ——! The bark *is* Jonered! A man no sooner shows he's got something in 'im than death lays hold!"

He could hear the oars, could hear Old Tom swearing at the rowers, and answered Tom's questioning shout of "Ye got 'im, Will?" with a savage "No!"

The boat drew up, oars were lifted, men leaned out peeringly with hands stretched to help, but Heddon grasped the gunwale.

"Ye have got 'im, Will! I knowed it!" said Tom proudly.

"Not him, no! Something queer—he's dead!"

They took the body into the boat, rowed back to the bark, climbed on board, hoisted up the boat and took Haskell's body out. It was laid on deck, face up, and men crowded about under the light of two lanterns.

"Can it be he is drowned?" said Heddon. "Then we'd better roll him over and get the water out of 'im!"

They rolled the body over, and there in the back, mingling with salt water that oozed from the shirt that clammily stuck to his back was the color of blood.

Heddon dropped to his knees and tore the shirt wide open; and near the middle of the back, a little to the left, just below the shoulder, was the dark thin-lipped mouth left by knife's thrust. Haskell had been stabbed and shoved overboard.

Still on his knees beside the body, Heddon lifted his eyes and stared ominously from one to another in the circle of faces; then he got up, struck Pelew's shoulder, fastening his hand there. Pelew drew back, jerking, pulling, and swung a fist at Heddon; but Heddon swung him around, thrust him into the circle of men, said:

"Let me see that knife! An' if there's a drop of blood on it—"

He left the threat unspoken.

Pelew growled, jeeringly, and with bold-eyed directness:

"You think I done that? Huh! Why d'you think I'd use a knife on a thing like him?"

Pelew shook his fist, defiantly, as if that were enough for any man.

"That knife, I said! He was a better man than you, that's why!"

Pelew cursed wildly, then:

"Take it yourself, —— you! If I touch it, I'll use it on you!"

He turned his back, insolently. Heddon drew away the knife from the sheath, peered at it under a lantern, turning it over and over. It was stainless, but could have been wiped; besides, much blood would not have come away from such a thrust as Haskell had received. The blade was bright as silver. Heddon drew its edge along the back of his wrist, then he flipped the knife over his shoulder and overboard, and with a kind of grim coaxing:

"You did it? Just say you did it. You did, didn't you?"

"You're a liar!"

"Then say you didn't do it!"

"I'll say what I —— well please, and when!" Pelew shouted, and with fists closed struck out to right and left, clearing a space.

"Before his shipmates, here?" Heddon asked. "He a man you've quarreled with—you won't say you didn't stick him in the back!"

"No man can make me say anything! 'R do anything! You, you big ——, I'd like to stick a knife in you, and break it off! Think because you're skipper you can give me ——? You can't! To—— with you! To —— with all you——!"

In the midst of his cursing, Pelew made an ape-like rush at Heddon. Heddon stepped aside, moving quickly, and with a backward swing of arm, warned men aside, saying—

"Keep out of this, all you!"

Then Pelew hit him, again, again, again. Pelew's fist, either fist, seemed to fly like a hammer from any direction.

Heddon, not at all doubtful as to how this would end, nevertheless had to fight and fight hard; and in backing away to keep from a clench that would mean rough-and-tumble wrestling, it looked for a time as if he were being worsted, and an eager man or two, anxious to get into Pelew's favor, for if Pelew won this fight he would lord it with a heavy hand, yelled—

"Go it, P'lew!"

Old Tom made some silencing remarks that were suitable and effective.

Heddon, who could use his head, took the chance when it came, and with an overthe-shoulder drive knocked Pelew into a staggering fall that put him down, knee and hand to the deck, some ten feet away; but as if the deck were a spring-board, Pelew came up and back. Heddon kept clear of his grappling arms, and after a clattering exchange of blows, knocked him off his feet and down, flat.

He got to his knees, shook himself, arose with a bit of stagger in his feet—and rushed.

Pelew had made the boast, over and over, that he was a bad 'un. He was. Heddon was the taller, the heavier, the more powerful, and knew how to fight; but Pelew was indomitably savage. He would not quit, however many times he was knocked down; even after even he, for all of his blind rashness, must have known the fight was hopeless, he got up and came back. His face was smashed and he was covered with blood. He swayed dizzily, but cursed as he swayed, and, though stumblingly, he rushed.

Heddon was merciless. There was none other than Pelew with whom Haskell, a quiet, though rather unprepossessing fellow with high forehead and badly shaped jaws, had had trouble. And Pelew was readily murderous. There was no doubt of that.

When Pelew lay unconscious Heddon stepped up, looked down at him, said:

"Tom, wash some of the blood off him. Give him water and put 'im in irons. Better put 'im in irons before he comes to. Be easier! And the lad Haskell—this ship is cursed!"

"Aye," said Old Tom wearily, "she's an unlucky ship. The worst I ever knowed. We've dripped blood from Lianfo to nigh Singapore. An' worse to come. Worse to come."

III

AN HOUR later it was still dark, and Heddon tramped the deck, walking heavily, scowling, not pleased with himself. His knuckles ached, and in rubbing them from palm to palm he thought of Pelew:

"Too much if he didn't do it—not enough if he did! ——! There can't be a doubt, though there's no proof."

Old Tom, with a lantern hanging from the crook of his arm, came aft, and he stopped before Heddon, stood still, said nothing, but held a knife on his palm.

"What's this, Tom?"

"I took a turn about the deck. Up there where Haskell went over I seen somethin' shine in the scupper. I make out a bit o' the color o' blood."

Heddon frowned at him, not speaking, not moving; then with reluctance he took up the knife, bent down close to the lantern, turned it slowly over and over. It was a narrow, six-inch blade, double-edged, had a mahogany handle with a wide thread of silver inlay. A fine piece of cutlery; one that any man would remember. There was a rust-like film on an inch or two of the point, and this came off as Heddon rubbed the blade on his palm.

"Whose knife?"

"Don't know, Will."

"You think Pelew didn't do it, eh?"

"He's a hard case, Will. But me an' Pelew allus got along."

"You and the Devil have always got along too!"

Old Tom looked at him without anger, understandingly, as Heddon with an air of sullen wrath turned and went up to the man at the wheel.

This was a stupid, piggish man called Mills, who had a protruding tooth that showed whether or not he grinned.

"Ever see this before?" Heddon asked, holding the knife over the binnacle.

Mills stared, reached out and touched the knife, then nodded, grinning stupidly:

"Yeah, Cap'n. Robbins, he found it in one o' the feller's chists, forrard there, day we all come on board. Yeah, it's his'n."

"Robbins. He was lookout tonight, wasn't he? And Haskell's friend?"

"Yeah, Cap'n. They was allus together, talkin' low. He was awful glad the way you smashed up that —— P'lew. So was I, Cap'n. I said—you ask 'em if I didn't say—"

"You've said enough," Heddon told him.

Heddon took the lantern from Old Tom and went forward, with Tom quietly coming after him to see what would happen.

Men lay about dozing or talking; they slept all standing, whenever they could, night or day, not being divided into watches, as it took all hands when there was anything to do; then, too, the bark was short-handed, dangerously so.

Two men sat hunched together on a sea chest near the galley, talking.

"Where's Robbins?" Heddon asked.

They stood up respectfully; one said:

"You want 'im, sir? Ho, Rob! Rob! The cap'n want yer!"

A lanky man came from out the shadows, saying as he came:

"I done my watch t'night, Cap'n. It ain't my turn for—"

Heddon swung the lantern light into his face, and with the other hand held up the knife. Robbins drew back with a staring gasp.

"Aye!" said Heddon. "Know it, don't you? Threw it overboard, didn't you? Well, Haskell's ghost went down and fetched it up for me to see, with the blood still on it. And the dead man says you did it! Why? Out with it—and be quick! The truth! you blasted dog!"

The lanky Robbins shook in every joint. Heddon spoke as if he had seen and spoken with the ghost. This was the hour of uneasy darkness before dawn, and Robbins's nerves were jangled. It did not on the instant occur to him that a hastily thrown knife might have struck a piece of rigging and fallen inboard, its clatter unnoticed in his excitement and downward peering at where the murdered man fell.

He started off with the trembling lie that he knew nothing, but Heddon's fist came up, and with both hands out reaching Robbins begged and stammered as he promised the truth. The truth came:

"We had a quarrel an'—an'—I couldn't stand it, the way he kept at me. I'll tell you, Mister! Don't hit me, now don't hit me! Him an' me onct killed a man in 'Frisco an' they 'rested a shipmate—sent him to prison. F'r life. Haskell allus felt bad about it, would git spells o' sayin' we had to go give ourselves up! Since the day he helped you kill that snake he's been worse. He was at me night an' day. When I was gittin' a bit o' sleep he'd wake me up. Said he couldn't sleep no more after the way you talked that day when we was a-buryin' the Dutchman! Said by —— he'd see to it I didn't git no sleep neither if I didn't 'gree to give myself up too. Said he'd shore kill me if I didn't—hones', Mister, he said that. Hones' he did! An' meant it too.

"It jus' got more'n I could stand. He meant it, an' I couldn't git no sleep. He was settin' there tonight with his legs over the rail, talkin' that way still—an' all of a sudden I jus' done it. Somethin' come over me, an' I jus' done it! If I'd 'a' thought, I'd never a done it! I'm sorry, Mister—I'm sorry! Then I throwed the knife, 'cause ever'-body knows it's mine! What you goin' do with me, Mister? I'm sorry an'— Ow!"

The fellow sobbed blubberingly as he begged, but shrank from Heddon's scowling stare. Heddon looked at him contemptuously, in anger, hating him, hating the sight of him, wishing he might step on him as on a cockroach, and end it. Other men in a silent circle, stared at him in a kind of sullen horror. He and Haskell had been always together, were the best of friends. And these men of the crew now expected Heddon to kill him, then and there; but without another word, Heddon turned and went aft. Old Tom followed.

"What ye goin' do, Will? To him?"

"Aye, what? You tell me! To do it in cold blood, that's like murder itself. To put to death even a wretch like that—in cold blood! I tell you it's got home to me that justice is a solemn thing. He deserves it, the worst that can happen! But if God wants that Robbins killed, God'll have to do it. I won't. If I'd known it when we first got the lad's body back on board, I'd have done it then—quick enough. Aye, Tom, I might have known that a man who stood up and fought like Pelew wouldn't stab anybody in the back. It was the way he hung off when the snake was loose that put me dead against him. But I'm through judging people. Give me the keys. I'm going down and turn him loose."

IV

HEDDON, carrying the lantern and a few keys on a string, went into the lazarette where Pelew lay in irons with a length of chain from his feet to a stanchion, for he was the sort of fellow that if left to move about would have made what wreckage he could of the stores.

Heddon, saying nothing—though Pelew shouted to know what he wanted, what he meant, told him to get out and stay out—looked about, then carefully hung the lantern overhead on a hook, well out of the way. Pelew might just be wild enough to start another fight, break the lantern and set the set the ship on fire.

"What you goin' do?"

"Turn you loose," said Heddon.

"You turn me loose—I'll jump you!"

"Suit yourself," said Heddon, stooping down, busy with the key in the leg iron lock.

Pelew, quick to see his chance, quietly drew in his hands, lifted his arms. The heavy handcuffs would be murderous. Heddon appeared not to notice. Pelew lowered his arms.

"Why," Heddon asked, glancing up, "didn't you try it? Then I could've walked out and left you here to rot."

"Why you turnin' me loose?"

"I'll say it when you're on your feet. Hold out your hands!"

He took off the handcuffs and tossed them aside. Pelew, folding his legs under him, rose without bending or touching hand to deck, rose as if his legs were good strong springs.

"Now what?" Pelew demanded, ready to fight.

"You've said it, twenty times, that you are a bad one. You are, Pelew; but you don't lack much of being a bad one in the right sort of way. But you're a bigger fool than most men. Robbins knifed him. If you'd said you didn't, I wouldn't have believed you, but I wouldn't have hit you the—"

"Hit me?" Pelew ran a hand over his bruised face. "What's this to me! I been hit by better men than you, an' I evened up on 'em—like I'll do with you. I'm agin you! I'm agin ever' man on this ship. No man ever got the best o' me an' no —— man ever will! Out o' my way, you —— !"

Heddon stepped aside, and Pelew went by him with a rolling ape-like stride; and in the shadows where he turned a parting look toward Heddon his bruised face had now a startling suggestion of ape-like features.

The next morning the body of Robbins was found in the scupper. It lay face up. It was as if he had got drunk and fallen there. But the black mark on the lanky throat was where the turn of a rope had squeezed the life out of him.

CHAPTER XIII

LANDFALL

A HAZE of land could be seen off the starboard quarter; but every man's eye was on the plume of smoke off the port bow. All else was sea.

T'eeay Layeen asked, though his asking was but the smooth courteous way of making a demand, that the bark be put under light canvas so as to barely keep way on her.

"What for?" asked Heddon.

"Tomorrow you will know."

"Tomorrow, eh? We'll be there. But you want to make the run in the night time and so hide the way as much as you can? That it?"

The Chinese, with a steady look, nodded; nodded without lowering his eyes.

The bark was stripped as if about to be hove-to in a gale, and everybody wondered, for the water was all a-wobble with a good strong wind.

Old Tom growled:

"I don't like it, Will. All this monkey-fussin' is bad, I tell ye!"

"You read the weather signs wrong, son," Heddon told him. "The Chink means less harm than I half suspected. His taking this much trouble to hide his treasure island means he expects us to get away alive—and be able to look for it again. Otherwise he'd sail right in, cut our throats and so make sure we'd never come this way again."

"Cut our—ye're crazy! He's our pris'ner, Will!"

"Take him prisoner? This shipload of numbskulls! You've got your head screwed on backward."

"You could do it, if ye wanted, Will," said Old Tom, not urging such a thing but expressing faith.

"Yes, we've got the Chinks outnumbered two to one. That's counting Vioux as a man, which is wrong; and not counting the Chink girl—as we should; for I told you once her hand will fit a knife as well as any man's! Try to take him prisoner and we'll get cut up. Do it, and we'll find Chink powder in our food, and have the cramps. Not much—I, for one, don't try it! Besides, I like the fellow. And who the —— ever thought I'd like a Chink!"

"Or Chink girl!" said Raeburn, and dodged too late, for Heddon's slap sent him sprawling; but the young scoundrel got up grinning.

T'eeay Layeen took his bearings in some way not clear to Heddon, and just before sunset sail was spread. The Chinaman himself stood at the wheel, and had the log heaved a dozen times through the night. With nightfall the volcano put on a dull glow. It was from this that the Chinaman took his departure and sailed through the night by dead reckoning. Heddon kept away from the binnacle, trying to show good will, and good manners, by not prying into the course; but he planned to take a peep from time to time at the compass in the chart-house. At his first peep he found that the compass had been broken.

"——!" said Heddon, "with their numbers and brains, why don't Chinks rule the world!"

At sunrise there was not a shadow of land anywhere on the water, and the bark had so turned about on her course that even Heddon found the sun coming up out of the north.

Raeburn felt his leg jerked and sat up.

"Come off your couch, Jack. And take the wheel. The Chink has lost his way. Everybody else is up and staring for the Isle of the Hidden Port—blastedly well hid, I'll say!"

Raeburn, with no hurry, got down off the deckhouse. Woo Lung, who had a gift for doing little gracious things unexpectedly, met him and offered a cup of strong black tea with a cheery sing-song greeting:

"Happy-day aw-day nicey boy. Galow!"

Raeburn drank the tea, chattering leisurely, then drew his belt another notch, looked about and went to the wheel.

There was much that was uncertain in the Chinaman's reckoning, for while he was staring off to starboard, Pelew, about eight o'clock, being aloft, lifted the cry of land-o and pointed off the port bow; then he bawled down at T'eeay Layeen:

"You're a —— of a navigator, you are! Look f'r land ten points off o' where you find it!"

"Ain't he got no sense at all, Will?" Tom inquired angrily.

"Your ears are as big as mine. Judge for yourself," said Heddon, eying the Chinese; but he appeared not to have heard.

They bore away for the shadowy dot that soon came to view from the deck in the direction that Pelew had pointed; but it was nearly an hour later before T'eeay Layeen nodded at Heddon.

"So that's it, eh? And is this how you make a landfall every time you come this way?"

He answered gravely, but just a little as if he resented Heddon's jeering:

"For five hundred years this isle has been known to those who serve the Sea Dragon, and not to other men."

Heddon said nothing, but did not believe it. No doubt Chinese pirates had, before T'eeay Layeen's time, scuttled off the sea to take shelter somewhere about this black island which, as they drew near, seemed more and more to be such a one as a sensible sailor would give a wide berth. A more uninviting place to look for shelter could hardly be imagined. It was a small island, not more than three or four miles long; at the westward end there appeared to be nothing but black steep-to cliffs, their crests fringed with growth that seemed peeping over rather than growing there; but the easterly end of the island tumbled down and tapered off into a smother of reefs, miles long. These reefs and the bleak headlands were enough to make any ship incurious and stand well out as it went by.

Heddon thought that they must be approaching the island from the wrong side, and would have to sail clear around to come to the anchorage.

He tried to picture great square-stern junks, crowded with men, deep with plunder, blowing up this way to hide here; but he had doubts about his picture. This island had more the aspect of one suitable for penal service than for a pirate's haunt; escape would be impossible; no boat could approach unseen; there was not a trace of beach, no place for anchorage, yet T'eeay Layeen told him that they reached the port from this side.

About four miles off, Heddon lowered the glasses. All he had been able to make out was an unbroken wall of rock where breakers exploded into mist, and as they drew near the booming of the surf had the sound of shore guns when warning off fog-bound ships.

"If that Hidden Port is on this side, it's well hid. You'd better be sure you've hit on the right island. That's a lee shore, and by the smell of the breakers there's a strong current here." Presently Heddon said: "I see a crack. Is that what we go through? And did you ever put a ship through there under sail?"

"As many times as there are grains of rice in a bowl."

"—— little bowl."

"It will be as if the gods breathed upon your sails."

"In which case," said Heddon, frowning doubtfully, "we'll brace up sharp to catch their breath. I don't want any leeward drift as we go in. And I'll tell you this much. If it wasn't that I believe you love your life as much as I love mine, I wouldn't try it."

"That," said T'eeay Layeen calmly, "is what has made it the Island of the Hidden Port."

For some moments with expressionless scrutiny he looked at Heddon, then spoke his thoughts:

"You are a navigator. Could T'eeay Layeen, who is Lord of the Sea, give to you so much honor that you would stay by him and guide his ships?"

"No, he couldn't!"

"There would be great wealth."

"There'd be great —— to pay! Right or wrong, each man to the color of his skin, for you can't be right and join with them that war on your own breed. What I say may not be clear, but it's truth!"

"This ship—" T'eeay Layeen's slim hand with slight gesture indicated the bark, its deck, and the fight they had made to seize it.

"Aye," said Heddon. "That's just what's made me feel as I do!"

Pelew, who had been listening, glared and frowned and blinked, and did not understand; he thought there was a cowardly spot somewhere in Heddon that made him throw aside this big fine chance to be somebody at the sort of work that should make anybody happy. Pelew cursed himself that he knew nothing of mathematics. He would have jumped quick enough to be a yellow pirate's pilot.

I

HEDDON took the wheel from under Raeburn's fingers. Close hauled she rode, and a mile away the breakers thundered, dead ahead.

"Hi-O!" said Raeburn, pointing astern. "There's our volcano still! Must be a change in the wind to bring her smoke to view."

Heddon held the wheel as if about to fight it, and did not cast a backward glance; but T'eeay Layeen had turned quickly, and for the first time since they had neared the island he took his eyes for any length of time from off the cliffs. Now he stared in long silence to where the merest plume of smoke was pushed up by the wind. He took the glass and watched, but the distance was too great to make out more than smoke. He knew this was no volcano, but a smoke-ship. Once he half raised his hand to speak, but with hand half raised he looked still toward the feather-mist of smoke. There was in his unconscious gesture something imperious; and now, though only Raeburn watched him, the fall of his half-lifted arm was as if he gave assent that the bark might go on.

"I don't see nothin' but trouble ahead! An' my eyes they are good," said Tom.

"I see a streak where the water rolls clear," said Raeburn. "But lord, the cliffs are steep-to! What if she strikes!"

"I ain't never seen a shore as steep-to as it looked from seaward. Let 'er strike. Give me footin' an' I'll have limpets f'r breakfus'!"

Old Tom champed hard on his tobacco and became silent. Which was just as well, for presently hardly a loud voice could have been heard; the sound of the surf that had been hoarse-throated became a tumult of thunder as breakers roared at them along the four miles of rock.

Pelew alone of the men forward did not take on a touch of paleness under the weather stain as the bark drove straight for the rock-bound lee shore. He, with a kind of wildness, jumped into the rigging, leaned far out, holding with hand and foot, shading his eyes. There was anxious staring from all men. They could now see well enough where they were going, though the passage looked perilously narrow; but they could not guess at what lay beyond.

Vioux, whose face was furry with the beginning of a beard's growth, opened and closed his mouth as he stared, as if trying to yell. Even Madame had come to the deck, but nothing remained of the appearance and bearing that had made her distinctive excepting her hair, black, heavy and neatly coiled. Her eyes were dull as the eyes of one who has lost memory; even when she looked toward Heddon there was nothing angry in her glance, but just a vague murky blankness.

Little Po-Shu was alone near a corner of the deckhouse, peering with breathless timidity. She glanced from side to side but not fearfully, and meeting Raeburn's eyes, smiled. He went to her. She said something with bright-eyed eagerness, but the surf was too loud for him to understand, then she lifted her hands against her black hair, pressing her ears to shut out the roar. Raeburn pulled one hand down, put his lips almost to her hair, shouted:

"We're all right—see him!" and pointed.

Raeburn pointed at T'eeay Layeen, who stood as expressionless as an image of lacquered wood carved into his own likeness; but Po-Shu looked at Heddon, and continued to look at him.

Heddon was braced for shocks at the wheel that never came. The wind with whipping flurries glanced from the cliffs, then blew as if through a funnel, and the bark was also caught in the pull of a strong current.

Of all hiding-places known to the Chinese pirates among all the peculiar formations of the uncounted, perhaps uncountable, islands strewn over far Eastern Seas, this had been found one of the most secret and secure. The high cliffs were mere shells, enclosing a harbor and small valley.

The bark plunged through with roll and heave. The walls of rock she passed between were not twice so thick as her own length; and going in she responded to the helm as if hauled by a tow-line. The current poured through like a river, and on out to sea again through another gap in the cliffs. The harbor spread out calmly as a pond toward the floor of a narrow valley, hardly above sea level. Here, near the water's edge, appeared to be a Chinese city, behind were rocks and jungle growth. Two big junks were anchored there.

Chinese were waiting for this white-devil ship, sighted by lookouts, which came plunging into the Hidden Port as if to give battle. Small cannon that guarded the entrance opened fire, and about the harbor, lying off to be well out range of the untrustworthy gunners, were small boats, crowded gunnel deep with half-naked Chinese.

The sound of the cannon was caught up and repeated in loud rapid echoes from the cliffs; and yelling started up from the pirates in the boats as with high flourish of weapons and frothy splash of oars they headed for the bark.

The cannon, but a small battery, fired raggedly and, considering the range, with bad aim even for Chinese. Some grape shot splattered the deck, and some missed as far as a man could throw. Among the solid shot discharged, one ball smashed through the deck, knocking out a shower of splinters. One volley, and the battery of brass cannon—from whose mouths black smoke boiled and, in the nearly motionless air of the sheltered, high-walled harbor, drifted slowly—was silent, leaving the water clear for boarders; and their boats, gathering way, came on with furious splashing, and loud yells, as if there was a prize for those that first cut a throat.

From forward the crew of the bark scuttled aft, running with lurches as they paused stumblingly to glance at the boats.

Pelew, aloft, bawled at the deck, "Trapped, by God!"—then he dropped clear of the rigging. The fall would have jarred any other man unconscious, but he fell to hands and knees, came up with a cat-like jump, straight at Heddon, yelling:

"We're trapped, Heddon! That Say-Lean—we'll kill him anyhow! And by ——, we'll give 'em —— while we can crawl!"

With that, Pelew dove for the ax in the rack at the side of the skylight.

Heddon grasped him, twisted away the ax, held him embracingly, and with mouth to ear shouted:

"No! Not that! He's our only chance! He's high lord and ruler here! See there, he waits for them!"

Young Raeburn was yelling at little Po-Shu, pulling her hand, and nearly pulled her from her feet though she went willingly as he took her aft and pushed her toward an open door. But she cried something in protest, and quick as a swallow twisted loose, spun about and darted between men and in behind Heddon, who did not notice her.

Woo Lung's wrinkled old face watched impassively. His hands were crossed in his sleeves before him, his shoulders hunched as if to take the whip.

T'eeay Layeen, with the slow motion of an outward-turned palm, gestured commandingly toward the men behind him, said clearly:

"You will not be hurt. Be quiet. They think this foreign devil-ship knew what to find. To pirates, devil-ships give no quarter and receive none."

Then he walked forward and stood alone between mizzen and mainmast, waiting with arms crossed, his hands empty, his clothes but the best choice among a coolie cook's meager bundle; yet he had the bearing of a dragon-faced emperor, standing as if not to ask mercy but to award death.

II

THE pirates in the small boats, expecting gun ports to open in the bark and roar at them, approached from all sides; their yells rang in echoes as if a horde of ghost-devils descended invisibly from the rocks to help in striking terror into the foreign devil-ship. The pirates brandished swords and knives, and outreaching arms held up, like odd banners, short bamboo ladders, the ends warped and dried into hooks. There was clattering bump and thump as the boats struck the side of the bark, the rattle of ladders hooking on the rail, click and clash of steel, unending yells; at all sides an instant's swarm of lean, barefooted, bare-waisted figures, scrambling inboard; there was the glint of knives between teeth as hands scratched with cat-like quickness at the rail, the wavering shimmer of bright-headed pikes tossed upward from the boats to down-reaching hands.

All was sinister confusion, fierce noise and fiercer scowling. Yellow faces glared with slant-eyed frowns, long crooked knives hung poised in up-lifted hands that did not strike as the Chinese stared with a look of fierce stupidity at the few people on the deck. They had expected a ship-load of foreign devils to boil up from hiding-places. The mystery of no resistance awed them; and of those that came up over the stern, some recognized Po-Shu and staringly encircled Heddon, made menacing flourishes but did not strike; some grabbed Woo Lung, questioning him; some made a rush into the deckhouse rooms, after loot, others tumbled below, scurrying through the bark like rats.

Among those swarming aft, one word caught from Woo Lung's mouth was repeated—T'eeay Layeen! Some pressed forward to see if it were true.

T'eeay Layeen, hemmed in on all sides, had not spoken. Those who saw him—all were wretchedly superstitious—thought this his ghost. He was dead. All men knew that. Yet here he was. Some gasped humbly, others in uneasy doubt, shrinking back. His name was repeated hurriedly, was shouted down to those still coming over the ladders, down to those in the boats. The fierce yelling, lifted to make their enemies afraid, ceased, but quick strange interrogatory cries rang out anxiously. The yellow pirates gazed back and forth at one another; many seemed half frightened; many stared and some pointed to one of the larger boats that had not joined in the attack, but was now approaching the bark.

A short fat officer, richly dressed, long sword in hand and the glimmer of jewels and gold at his belt, came over the taffrail and pushed through those about the prisoners, eying them rapidly with contempt, until he saw Po-Shu, then his eyes popped from surprize, and a fat grin of delight appeared. But he was hearing the name of T'eeay Layeen from all sides; and when he spoke, questioningly, a babel answered him and twenty arms pointed forward.

Then men with barefoot trampling on one another's toes pushed back, making way. T'eeay Layeen himself came.

The officer turned, startled; he seemed to hesitate whether to bow his head or lift his sword, but did neither.

T'eeay Layeen's face was as immobile as if carved of ivory, but the slanting eyes had a gleam of scorn as he spoke:

"So one I named Shui-Mu now has command over men in my city."

The one called Shui-Mu (Jelly Fish) uneasily slid one richly slippered foot back, then the other, as if to edge off from this dreaded chief, but said with anger:

"Tsing-Ku is now Lord of the Hidden Port. I serve him. These are his men! Lo, he is here!"

Shui-Mu, once so named for an act that seemed to warrant the insult, with a gesture of relief and triumph pointed to where men were again in quick alarm pushing back to clear the way for a small man, dressed in silk from cap to jeweled slippers. He wore a long sword, too long for his height, with rubies in the hilt, and the scabbard, tipped with a lump of filigreed gold, was of intricately carved ivory. He was a small man with a lean yellow face, and with what seemed to be two long drooping mice tails for a mustache. The look of much cold cunning was in his narrow eyes, and he had been famous as one of T'eeay Layeen's pirate captains because of his craft and cruelty.

No man was his equal in cunningly getting information from the pirate spies in Chinese ports as to what junks were putting out to sea with what cargo, where the war junks were and where they would be next; and he was crafty in getting money from merchants that their junks might not be attacked, and in arranging the ransom of prisoners. He had his use, was important, but his bravery had never been such as won much admiration from the war-like T'eeay Layeen, who had been distrustful of Tsing-Ku; but for that matter had been always a little distrustful of even his favorite officers, knowing that true men are those who are never given a chance to see advantage in being false.

Now face to face, T'eeay Layeen stood a head the taller; by three heads, even in the blouse and trousers of a ship's cook, the more imperious; but Tsing-Ku, though a cunning man, did not make even a pretense at friendliness. He, with good reason, was sure of himself.

"I," said T'eeay Layeen, "left Captain Po in command!"

"He," Tsing-Ku replied smoothly, with insolent light-fingered pull at one mustache, then the other, "He has become Immortal!"

Tsing-Ku, who liked the sight of blood, when he put prisoners to death, would sit by in a throne-like chair, observing critically the beheading stroke; and he called this pastime "The Making of Immortals."

"I knew," said T'eeay Layeen, "that the brave Captain Po was dead. His boat was not first among those that came now to the attack!"

The heart of Tsing-Ku may have writhed, but he smiled faintly as if untouched.

Many among the pirates were new men, who knew T'eeay Layeen only by name; but Tsing-Ku himself, when the spoils of a fight were outspread, had often seen T'eeay Layeen step forward and claim first choice—not by his right as chief, but by the law of the Sea Brothers, which gave that right to any man, coolie or captain, who in the fight had been the first to lay on board the plundered ship.

The gods who give this man one gift, another some other blessing, had not given to Tsing-Ku that strength of heart which lifts a man through the smoke and over the manned bulwarks of an enemy ship. Tsing-Ku was much the same sort of warrior as the spider.

Now, though insulted, he smiled. The pirates, encirclingly pressed with breasts to backs and heads thrust forward, waited. In the long pause that Tsing-Ku made before he answered there could be heard the hot breathing of tense men, and the remote orchestral thundering of the waves muffled by the rocks they beat upon.

Then Tsing-Ku, lifting his voice, replied—

"You come as suppliant, and shall hear the truth!"

"I, suppliant!"

T'eeay Layeen's voice was pitched to an anger that would have made one less cunning than Tsing-Ku crouch on his knees; but Tsing-Ku, who knew the greed that lies within the hearts of men, answered:

"Contrary to the law of the Sea Brothers, which requires that all shall share in any wealth found or captured, you stole away the Treasure of the Emperor's Daughter!"

Voices broke out with angered greedy cries, and the sound of rage at T'eeay Layeen grew until Tsing-Ku lifted his arm in a graceful gesture, commanding silence. He had more to say; this:

"The hiding-place of the Treasure of the Emperor's Daughter was known to you alone. Often you promised the day when all would have it before their eyes. By that promise you made men suffer your injustice and follow you into foolish battles. Perhaps you wished so many would be killed that none would be left to claim what you had promised! And what need was there to seize salt junks and fisher-boats when the wealth of a treasure fleet lay on this island? You were false to these brave men! By stealth you removed that treasure from its hiding-place on board your junk, and you fled to a far country. The just goddess Kwan-Yin punished your treachery, and the junk sank! Now you come again to use these brave men you have cheated to gather more fortune—that again they may be cheated!"

Cries went up from mouths that had opened thirstily at the mere mention of that fabulous treasure, whose place of concealment had been known to T'eeay Layeen alone, and who had promised some day to bring it forth as common plunder.

Tsing-Ku, being full of guile, had told this same story long before in spreading discontent among those who would have remained loyal during T'eeay Layeen's absence. Tsing-Ku had not waited for the report of T'eeay Layeen's death before making himself Lord of the Hidden Port.

T'eeay Layeen now waited until voices had quieted for eager listening; and he, without arms and among savage men who were no longer friends, answered with imperious calm:

"You have spoken lies!"

Tsing-Ku made but the suggestion of a bow, ironically; then raised a hand, and with slight turn of head to right and left, spoke for all to hear:

"You have heard. If he did not take away the treasure on his junk as I have said, then it is here! Let him now say to us where it lies hid!"

Savage yells went up in an instant's tumult, clamorously, with menace, demanding that T'eeay Layeen speak.

They who risked their lives in boarding armed and convoyed merchantmen for a few sacks full of coin, knew that by one revealing word from T'eeay Layeen every man of them could become as rich as a prince.

"Will you say where the treasure is?" asked Tsing-Ku triumphantly.

"It is here. But while you are Lord of the Hidden Port, I will not speak!"

Voices rose clamorously; shrill cries full of threats; men yelled for torture; weapons were lifted overhead. The pirates howled.

If T'eeay Layeen had stolen the treasure and carried it off in his junk, as Tsing-Ku had made many believe, then, great chief that he was, he deserved the torture like any pirate that was thief enough to steal from a brother; if not, and the treasure lay still secure, then torture should make him speak. Either way, the great T'eeay Layeen, no longer chief, was to be put to the torture. Such were the cries of the yellow pirates.

Tsing-Ku, who knew his men for what they were, with a slight graceful gyrating gesture, said carelessly—the careless manner greatly increasing the insult—

"Seize him!"

Men started eagerly, with hands put out to show quick service; eager, too, to make T'eeay Layeen speak of treasure.

He did not draw back, but turned his head quickly and men paused before his glance.

On the instant there pressed forward one lank, lean, half-naked yellow fellow, scarred from forehead to thigh; his drawn sword was poised upward, and he struck at the arm of a man who reached at T'eeay Layeen's arm—and the man's forearm dropped, severed above the elbow.

Tsing-Ku, who loved the sight of blood, had other feelings at the sight of bare steel, and squeezed himself back hastily, with much fear.

The lank lean fellow cried out—

"T'eeay Layeen I have followed into twenty battles. Twice his sword saved this worthless life of mine, and while I live no man lays hand on him!"

Then he died. Shui-Mu, called Jelly-Fish in scorn, was not Tsing-Ku's choice of captain without reason, and he drove his sword through the back of the lank old pirate who threw up his arms and fell forward, carrying away the sword from Shui-Mu's hand so that it remained upright in the fallen body, and for a moment trembled as if the good steel shuddered at the treacherous use made of it by an unworthy man.

Then Shui-Mu himself laid hold upon T'eeay Layeen, as he might do bravely now, for the dreaded T'eeay Layeen's hands were empty; and Shui-Mu had drawn a dagger from his belt. Other men seized upon T'eeay Layeen and trampled over the fallen body. Life was the cheapest thing among them. Punishment for less offense than this man's was death; so quick a death was mercy for one who had insulted Tsing-Ku.

Tsing-Ku, again as composed as if his hasty backward step had been merely to steady himself from a slip of his foot, said with a pitch of voice meant to carry far among the men—

"Torture will make him speak!"

A babel of sing-song voices rose; men yelled as if over a triumph; some cried Tsing-Ku! in praise; others, eager to please, called for him to make the foreign devils immortal!

TSING-KU gave orders that were repeated and passed about with the sound of disorder. A confused bustling and much shrill yelling was among the Chinese pirates taken as indication of energy and promptness. They could be quiet enough when slipping in at night to board some moored junk, or to hear something that they wanted to hear when their officers spoke; but not otherwise.

Now there was loud commotion as they made fast bamboo cables to the bark, tumbled into their boats that strung out and laid hold on the towing lines.

From Tsing-Ku's boat a broad, heavy, carved chair was raised to the bark's deck, a rug was laid, his body-guard ranged themselves behind with pikes in hand and swords at belt. The chief of these was one Li Neng, a big man, who held a heavy crescent-bladed sword and was the executioner. Shui-Mu, the Jelly-Fish, placed himself at a side of the chair. As the bark was being towed to the beach, Tsing-Ku, who liked to be regal and show luxury, enjoyed having T'eeay Layeen stand between drawn swords directly before the chair—not that he might gaze upon him, but that he might pointedly ignore this great commander, who had been called the favorite of Kwan-Yin, goddess of the Sea Brothers.

Tsing-Ku now had the prisoners paraded. The first to be brought forward was little Po-Shu. At the sight of her Tsing-Ku stroked his mustache with dainty gestures and smiled, pleased.

Po-Shu, from babyhood, had been trained

in the ritualistic grace of humbling herself in the presence of superiors, and all men were superior to a woman. Her training had been such that had she been led by the chief eunuch into the presence of the emperor, every step, word, bow or bump of her forehead against the cold stone floor would have been flawless. With shy humbleness she approached Tsing-Ku, and her little body melted into a posture of abjectness that was pleasing to Tsing-Ku. Some of his rebellious discontent had grown from the refusal of T'eeay Layeen to give to him this flower-girl, who was dainty and humble and treasure-hearted.

Tsing-Ku felt this indeed a great hour. T'eeay Layeen was his prisoner, Po-Shu his captive. Torture would reveal the Treasure of the Emperor's Daughter. Tsing-Ku was pleased with the way the gods rule the affairs of men.

He said to Shui-Mu—

"To the House of the Water Lilies!"

Shui-Mu quickly picked four from among the attendants behind the chair. This was a mission of honor. They stepped forward like men chosen for bravery to serve beauty; and little Po-Shu, helpless and humble, was led away with eyes downcast.

The two coolies were then brought forward. They came with hands to elbows and backs bowed. Tsing-Ku with a glance let them pass. The next was Woo Lung, no longer cheery; he kneeled but did not beg. Tsing-Ku questioned him, learned that he had been ship's cook for white men, and saw in him an interpreter, needed in questioning these other prisoners. With an air of kindliness he flattered Woo Lung, turned a phrase or two that would have caused almost any hopeful man to think that fortune had come to him. Woo Lung made low bows, answering with ceremonial gratitude that he, a mere wretched son of a turtle was most exalted to be in such an illustrious presence. All of which was but the ritual of polite conduct taught to Woo Lung when a child and hopeful of rising to high officialdom in the service of the emperor.

One after another of the sailors passed before Tsing-Ku while Woo Lung told the story of Po-Shu, of Heddon's schooner wrecked, of T'eeay Layeen's coming out of the sea at dawn, of the bark, its fight and capture, of the voyage to the Island of the Hidden Port.

Three sailors had passed, trembling as foreign devils do in the presence of brave Chinese, then came Pelew, with shambling ape-like swagger, and his bold eyes stared fixedly at Tsing-Ku. He said:

"Look here, mister, I don't speak your lingo but I can fight. An' I'm a navigator! None o' these fellers here are my friends. I'll throw in with you. Cook, you tell 'im what I say. I'm willin' to take my chance with yeller p'rates. An' I'm a navigator! You tell 'im that. You hear me?"

The tone was fierce, the bearing like anger; Pelew glared as if he knew what he was about, or would soon be about, if anybody started trying to mistreat him.

Tsing-Ku glanced questioningly at Woo Lung, and the old scholar who had fallen low looked at Pelew from the depths of his wrinkled eyes, then spoke to Tsing-Ku, thus:

"To you, O Son of the Dragon, this man of the foreign devils has said: 'O Illustrious Ruler of the Sea, I am unworthy of so much honor as I beg! Though my wretched tongue does not speak your noble language, my arm understands the speech of battle. I am skilled in ship-lore of foreign devils, and when I speak to a ship it goes as I say and where. I can steer your junks with only the sun and stars to show the way. These men are not my friends; but you I will serve, glad to die in your honorable service. Born of fierce foreign devils, I know not the manners of cultivated people, but I can fight. Abjectly I await the movement of your honorable lips!' "

Thus spoke Woo Lung the cook, interpreting for Pelew the sailor.

Tsing-Ku asked a question or two, and Woo Lung lied favorably; then Tsing-Ku lifted one eyebrow, interested, and gently stroked the few long hairs that hung from his upper lip. Trustworthy pilots were rare. Pelew had known as much. Tsing-Ku said a word, and Shui-Mu hid his surprize and showed courtesy to Pelew, leading him aside.

Madame was thrust forward. There were unpleasant sounds from the Chinks. This was a woman. There were women on the island, many of them, wives; but this one was different and might be flung to them as meat to dogs, since there was hardly that beauty about her that would draw special care from the Lord of the Island.

Madame's face was pale; her black eyes were fixed in a dull stare that turned from face to face. She looked sick and she was terrified. These hot-eyed, hot-mouthed, half-naked, slant-eyed yellow men were not unlike the fearful images that come in nightmares when one dreams of fiends. The first of a woman's fears among wild strange men is just what Madame feared; and had she understood their words, sensed their minds, she could not have had greater fear.

Tsing-Ku turned slightly, smiling, and over his shoulder said:

"Li Neng—" this, the executioner who carried the heavy crescent sword—"to you I promised the next unransomed woman."

Li Neng grinned widely, appraising the gift; not much of a gift, but woman.

"What they do wiz me? What— Oh, what is eet?"

Woo Lung with quiet unhappiness said:

"You b'long him. Poo' niceey Missus. Ol' Woo Lung solly!"

"To heem! Oh, nevare! Nevare, *par Dieu Notre Seigneur!*"

With a cry like that of suicide, she clutched at her hair, fastened her fingers deep into the coils, snatched away the heavy black wig, and threw it.

The Chinamen stared in a moment's astonishment, then laughed; they turned toward Li Neng, laughing; they shouted at him; they told him this was no woman, but a bald old man. Even Tsing-Ku, who was pleased with this day's work and loved a joke, laughed soundlessly. The big Li Neng stared with foolish embarrassment and made distasteful gestures by way of reply to shouts that asked if he wanted a bald old man.

Madame, who had become like a man in their eyes, now with the sound of their mocking voices upon her ears, ran her fingers fumblingly over her naked head, then drew her hands down over her face, before her eyes and turned blindly, trying to hide, like a woman suddenly stripped of all clothing. She was hustled and shoved indifferently over among the group of sailors that had passed before Tsing-Ku. There she hid her face in her hands and sobbed without tears.

IV

VIOUX, scratching nervously at his face, was passed by without a second glance; young Raeburn, with the impudence out of him, and Old Tom, with red-rimmed eyes blinking angrily and a cheek full of tobacco, went by unnoticed. There was nothing about them to interest Tsing-Ku; but he looked with interest at Heddon, who was a big man, straight and broad, and though his face was clouded with a scowl as he stared down at Tsing-Ku, the pirate Lord bent his ear, listening as Woo Lung told that this was a man terrible in fight, a great navigator who could read the sun and stars, a pirate among white men.

Instructed by Tsing-Ku, Woo Lung asked:

"You catchee 'long pi'ate men, Capun? He makee you numba one man all samee Pelew fella. Can do?"

"No," said Heddon.

"What has he said?" asked Tsing-Ku.

"He has answered, O Eldest Son of the Dragon, that he hesitates only because he is unworthy of so great an honor," said Woo Lung humbly.

"Can the *Ying-jen* tongue say so much with so small a sound?" asked Tsing-Ku.

"Oh, One Favored of Heaven, how you see those things hidden from other men!" said Woo Lung anxiously. "This English is a rude speech as you can tell by the sound and in it there is no way that one may speak courteously even if one desires!"

Tsing-Ku, though no fool, nodded. It did not displease him to accept the explanation. He would never have thought of showing courtesy to foreign devils, whom he usually put away in a vault to starve, if Pelew had not given him the idea. There was that in Heddon's bearing that pleased him; such a man among his bodyguard would be impressive.

Tsing-Ku's cruelty was terrible, but his anger was not the kind that broke out in a rage. He knew, or thought that he did, that service was to be got out of men by two things, and two only: fear of punishment and hope of reward.

Tsing-Ku, with eyelids half adroop, looked at Heddon steadily; his elegant fingers toyed with a ruby clasp on his breast, then, half idly he loosened the clasp and spoke sharply, at the same time making an odd whirling gesture with his wrist. Then Heddon was made to realize something of what it meant to be held by Chinese pirates, who regarded life as the cheapest thing among them, for Li Neng, the executioner, with a man or two at his side, with swords drawn or drawing them, pattered toward the prisoners; there was a moment's shuffling, cry upon cry of fright above the rapid clatter of Chinese sounds, then Li Neng emerged from the group, his blood-wet sword in one hand, and in the other the head of one of the bark's coolies. Li Neng grinned much like a dog that comes to its master with the thrown stick in mouth, and stood before him with the head uplifted held out at arm's length.

Tsing-Ku with a slow graceful unfolding of his left hand, pointed; with the other he held out the ruby clasp, and lifted his eyebrows interrogatively and awaited Heddon's reply.

It came with a growl and glare that needed no interpreter:

"—— —— your soul! No!"

Heddon's knotted face was lighted with so much disgust, so reckless an anger, that men of the body-guard about the chair lowered their pikes, and some raised swords. Heddon looked as if about to jump and jerk Tsing-Ku from his royal chair and twist off his head; and the Chinese glanced apprehensively to right and left, then seeing himself well guarded, became at ease. With a flowing movement of hand he delicately stroked his mustache, at the same time refastening the ruby clasp, and a moment later made a slight gesture and Li Neng tossed overboard the head of the coolie that had been cut away to serve as an object lesson.

Tsing-Ku spoke quietly:

"We will make this devil immortal, now!"

The Chinese jabbered, praising Tsing-Ku, and Li Neng, grinning, stepped forward, while Heddon glared at him, doubtfully, suspicious but not quite sure.

Then up spoke the prisoner, T'eeay Layeen, speaking from between drawn swords. He stood there in his place of humiliation, but with a bearing not yet humiliated, as was becoming in one so often called unconquerable. T'eeay Layeen was crafty, resourceful, and had the blessing of great courage. He knew that he would be tortured as cruelly as Tsing-Ku could devise; he knew that if he spoke of treasure he would be put to death, for while he lived Tsing-Ku would have dread of him; he knew that every cruel means would be used to make him suffer, yet keep him alive, until he had spoken of treasure. He knew Tsing-Ku.

So now T'eeay Layeen lifted an arm, commanding silence upon a deckload of men who were his enemies, and addressing their lord, said with composure:

"Tsing-Ku, your torture may make me speak of treasure. I do not know. It is written that the superior man lives but to learn. As one eager for knowledge I look forward to what you may teach me of myself before I die. But this man—" with a slow gesture he indicated Heddon, who frowned, understanding nothing—"has been my friend. Harm him before I die, and I bite my tongue and spit it from between my teeth, so that whatever the torture, I can not speak of treasure!"

The quality of T'eeay Layeen's character was such that even his enemies knew that he would do as he said if Heddon were now put to death. No other word under Heaven could have saved Heddon's neck. But Tsing-Ku was confident that he could make T'eeay Layeen eager to speak; and having listened with a slight fixed smile, now gazed upon T'eeay Layeen with much the unangered thoughtfulness of a great chessman who studies the clever check of a master player, smiled calmly, and answered—

"If you become stubborn he may not live until you have spoken."

Heddon, understanding nothing of all this, understanding nothing but the menace and barbarity of the pirates, turned toward T'eeay Layeen:

"If they mean to cut my head off, tell me! I'll snatch away a sword and—"

Tsing-Ku shouted, interruptively, and Chinese pushed between Heddon and T'eeay Layeen who shouted above the commotion:

"Keep hope! Keep hope!"

Voices bubbled, rose noisily, angrily, into a shrill sing-song clatter; gestures went up, menacingly, but no blows were struck; and when there was again silence, Tsing-Ku inquired of his interpreter what words had passed between these men in that speech of devils, called English. Woo Lung answered saying:

"The foreign devil said, 'I will pray to the Great White God, and we will be safe'; and T'eeay Layeen answered, 'Do that! Do that!' "

Woo Lung shivered as if in horror; the shiver was real, for the dread thought came to him: What if some of these men understand the vile *Ying-jen* speech!

Man knows not always when good fortune falls. At that moment, T'eeay Layeen appointed Woo Lung steward of the enormous and inestimable treasure hidden within the cave which had its secret opening, wrought by ancient masons, masters of cunning, from the shrine-room of the goddess Kwan-Yin. As Lord of the Sea, T'eeay Layeen had believed no man wholly worthy of trust; now in his hour of disaster he had found one, a mere ship's cook, a fallen scholar, who was loyal without hope of gain.

If he lived long, T'eeay Layeen knew that although there remained none among the pirates whom he would trust, he would somehow find means of escape; he was that self-reliant, resourceful, and courageous. He knew that Tsing-Ku did not dare put him to death before he spoke, else the secret of the treasure would be lost. But it remained to be seen how long he could withstand the torture that Tsing-Ku, the most cunning of merciless men, would devise.

CHAPTER XIV

THE TREASURE STRONGHOLD

THE Island of the Hidden Port, haunt of yellow pirates, was sacred to Kwan-Yin, Goddess of Mercy, patroness of sailors, though anything like mercy was never known within the shadow of its black cliffs. These cliffs were honeycombed with caves, galleries, mysterious passages; and much stonework was in ruins, as if at one time there had been many slaves and an exacting master who had tried to get a sort of splendor out of the cavernous formations.

Perhaps the secret of the island harbor had been discovered and lost many times. Being apparently inaccessible and barren, the island might have been put down on charts of European navigators from the days of the Portuguese without seeming more than a big rock, fringed at one end with perilous reefs.

Legend said that the first Chinese to use the island was the great pirate Hwang, who three hundred years before had discovered it through the mercy of the goddess Kwan-Yin. Drifting dismasted after a storm, he had been caught by the current and, expecting to be dashed against the cliffs, he had made many prayers; as a result his junk had been carried safely into the harbor. But the stonework was old even then. It was he who had discovered the treasure chamber, finding its stone doors open as if left so by those who had plundered the cave and left in haste. With but little scraping of dust and lichen, the Magic Stone, so perfectly had it been balanced by ancient masons, again opened and closed easily; but when closed, so artfully was it fashioned, it seemed but a rock, upon which as upon other rocks, there were fantastic designs graven into their hard surface.

Hwang grew in power until he did not hesitate to plunder even the Mogul's treasure fleet, and had once captured even the Mogul's daughter. Within the secret cave he stored the choicest plunder taken by his pirate fleet; and those who stored the wealth away, and so learned the secret of the treasure chamber, kept the secret inviolable, forever. The rock was closed upon them and fastened, and they starved in the midst of incalculable wealth.

Hwang and most of his fleet were destroyed at sea; and how long afterward the island was used by pirates is unknown. But the island and the legend of its treasure persisted, and reached the ears of Europeans and became one of the many fabulous stories that stirred the imagination of Far Eastern adventurers.

T'eeay Layeen as a very young man became such a captain as won the regard of a savage old pirate chief known as Lay, the Thunder, and so was introduced to the Hidden Port.

Lay himself had discovered it partly by accident. In passing at a distance he had been attracted by a smoke signal; standing in nearer he had seen men waving long bamboos with the top leaves untrimmed. He went around the island, unable to discover, from what he considered a safe distance, a place for landing. Twice he gave orders to sail on, but twice the gentle Kwan-Yin, who loved him greatly, caused him to change his mind; and at last he sent a boat away to skirt the cliff. Thus the hidden entrance was discovered.

On the island he found fifteen or twenty Malays, half starved amid such offal treasure as Malays think it worth the risk of life to win; and as Malays are the natural enemies of Chinese, with no right at all to such an island as this, Lay put the Malay wretches to death, mercifully with swords, and not as they deserved with bamboo splinters. Thus he made the island his own secret, and the time came when, being old, he made T'eeay Layeen his heir. As Lay was greatly loved by the gentle goddess, he died in peace, of old age and too much wine; and T'eeay Layeen built him a fine tomb.

Every one from the makers of stink-pots to T'eeay Layeen knew that this was the old fabulous island of Hwang. His name was written into rock with boastful inscription of ships taken and men put to death and treasure captured, so that all pirates who came after him might read and feel small. He had indeed been a lord of the sea with a great right to a little boasting. But there was no word of where lay the treasure chamber.

The pirate crews scratched high and low; every corner and nook was searched; old walls that looked as if they might have secrets behind them were broken through, lizards and rats were turned out of ancient hiding places; men rushed into dark passages, bearing torches, and the torches went out and men died from the breath of the guardian dragons lurking there. T'eeay Layeen knew that fresh air drove the deadly dragons away; but when men again entered nothing was found but bare dungeons and the crumbling bones of the long dead.

Then came that most memorable of days when T'eeay Layeen showed to the pirates handfuls of jewels and handfuls of the pure gold dust which was part of the ransom of the emperor's daughter. He said that if all men were loyal and fought well, in the end this treasure would be shared among them. He said that he had been blessed by a dream from the Goddess Kwan-Yin in which the place of the treasure had been revealed, and as a mark of his gratitude he fashioned a shrine for her in a dark stone room that had an open doorway; and in this doorway he set heavy doors of teak that could be closed upon himself and barred within when he withdrew to pray long hours to the favoring goddess. And he caused soothsayers to declare, and impress upon the superstitious men, that the greatest token and forewarning sign of disaster that could come was the disappearance of the four-foot gilt statue of the goddess from within the shrine, which was without window, or doorway other than that which opened into the Hall of the Thousand Pillars.

There came the time when T'eeay Layeen with six junks under his command laid a course to attack and sack a fortified town, but paused on their voyage to crowd down upon an English merchantman, a great square-rigged ship that fled so awkwardly the very prisoners on the junks laughed scornfully; but when overhauled, the scoundrel Englishman dropped ports, ran out guns until her sides bristled, and opened fire upon the junks decoyed within range. T'eeay Layeen, instead of trying to be the first to flee, after the manner of his other captains, drove his junk almost alongside of the Englishman, and with every one of his small cannon roared at the Englishman's rigging. He sank his junk and lost three hundred brave men, for the small boats in which they fled from the sinking junk were smashed by the English gunners; but with rigging damaged the Englishman could not give chase, so that Captain Po stood out of range and picked up such as could swim to the boats he put into the water; and one of these was T'eeay Layeen.

Three junks were lost, and two were badly damaged, for Englishmen have devils to help them when they fight.

Those men and captains who escaped and returned to the island, instead of being filled with revengeful desires as was T'eeay Layeen, were mutinously disheartened. Piracy seemed no longer worth the risk. They were hope-broken and discontented. If foreign devils were to be such scoundrels as to make gun-ships look like helpless traders, who would be safe?

T'eeay Layeen—being so advised, he said, by Kwan-Yin—now distributed jewels from the hidden treasure among his crew, and passed about a few handfuls of gold, fine as flour, unlike any known to men, which had been a part of the very ransom paid for the exquisite body of the emperor's daughter. He made them understand that all this, compared with what remained, was no more than the seed to the pear; and he again affirmed that among those who were brave and loyal this treasure, gathered by the terrible Hwang in old time, would be shared.

Yet when he had gone off in his palatially fitted junk to bring back guns to arm his ships and make the island gates impregnable, Tsing-Ku, the crafty, spread the story that T'eeay Layeen had fled with treasure.

When the junk was being outfitted, that was just what Tsing-Ku, who judged other men by himself, feared T'eeay Layeen was preparing to do; so he had spied closely and made certain that the junk carried no more wealth than a wealthy mandarin's brother might bear.

Tsing-Ku was, therefore, the only one on the island who knew that the treasure remained. He knew that it would now be hard to make the iron-hearted T'eeay Layeen talk, but was confident that even T'eeay Layeen must weaken to see himself die inch by inch day by day. What Tsing-Ku did not entirely appreciate was that T'eeay Layeen knew Tsing-Ku well enough to know that he, T'eeay Layeen, would be put to death immediately if he did weaken and reveal the treasure store.

II

THE pirate city was in a hubbub day and night with gambling, cricket fights, merry drinking games, feasting; and every ten minutes or less noisy quarrels started up that lasted for hours, or days. As long as men fought with tongues they might fight as they pleased; but if sticks were used, the brawlers were seized and had half the life beaten out of them; if knives were drawn they were beheaded. Thus was a very noisy sort of peace maintained.

Thieves had their hands chopped off, and being put into *cangues*, were left to bleed to death in the market-place. The *cangue* was something like a heavy cage from which the head protruded; and these cages, whipping posts, beheading blocks, bastinado beds, and such other contrivances as were used in punishment—for often many were punished at the same time—stood in an open place as a warning to evil-doers; and children played about them, poking little shaven heads into *cangue* cages, and playing at punishment.

Yet there were murders and much thievery; but assassins and thieves paid respectful courtesy to the law by being furtive.

Here was the strong stench of a Chinese seaport; filth lay scattered about; pigs and chickens ran loose; and the people smelled as if they bathed in bean oil and dried themselves in punk smoke. There was an entire village of flimsy shelters, built of bamboo, ship wreckage, boughs and vines and straw, with clumsy archways standing at what was supposed to be the street entrances. These arches were erected to keep out devils, and always a few papers covered with exorcising inscriptions fluttered from strings.

Many of the sailors lived among the rocks, huddling in damp, dark places, for the best quarters were taken by captains, pilots and gunners.

It was evident that the floor of the little valley was either slowly sinking or had been lowered by earthquake, for some of the ancient stonework was under water.

When the small boats in which the prisoners were being brought ashore grounded, the prisoners were yelled at in every angered pitch of Chinese voice, pricked with many knife points, and so made to understand that they must step out and wade up the shallow beach.

Heddon's first sensation on feeling the ground under him was that a mild earthquake was shaking the island; then he realized that the vibration was the tidal beat of the ocean on the shell of rock.

T'eeay Layeen had been given a special guard and was not among the Europeans, who were surrounded on the beach by Chinese. There was rapid squealing and much chattering, as if everybody was angry; much gesticulation, all in friendliness among themselves, but the foreign devils were mocked and menaced with knives to see whether they would flinch. Some among them were women, mostly plump-faced, often with dirt on their cheeks and red paint on their mouths. They were short-bodied, strong-looking women, coarsely bold and shrill of voice, with pendent earrings, bangles about their black hair; some of their blouses were of rich stuff, all were greasy and torn. The women had wide feet, which indicated that since they were not Manchu women they were coolies, mostly river women, gathered up in raids, having an easier life as the wives of pirates than they had found in their husband's sampans.

By the law of the Sea Brothers, as laid down by T'eeay Layeen and by many another pirate chief, a man could not put aside his wife, and no other man could take her—without losing his head. As troublesome as the wives were, for they took advantage of the security of the law to scold and complain endlessly if more finery fell to another, yet wives were much sought after, for even the coolie seamen wanted to be worshiped when dead by their male children.

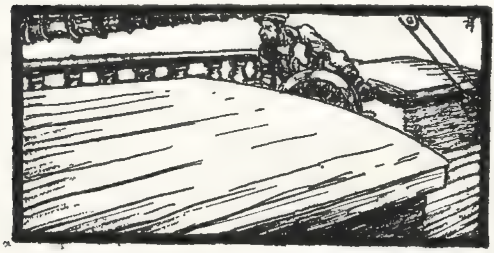
A few naked children now scrambled about, in between legs, getting kicked and scolded, but not caring.

The foreign devils from the boats were

gathered into a group, but it was at Madame and at Heddon that the Chinese stared. They laughed at Madame's bald head, for the joke that had fallen upon Li Neng was told among them, and she bit her lips and kept her eyes downcast. At times she staggered a little unsteadily, as if dizzy.

They stared at Heddon because his shoulders towered above their heads and he had a look of scowling anger on his face instead of fear, and this they resented. But wisdom would come to him, as wisdom comes to all men—through pain.

After an excited palaver for no excitable reason at all, the one who seemed an under-officer in charge of the prisoners at last got his detail arranged. Swords were poked at the backs of the prisoners and some of the Chinese trotted ahead, but with heads twisted backward to see if the others were coming. The crowd followed a little way, but with much calling from one to another, soon broke away and scurried back toward the beach. T'eeay Layeen was being brought ashore.



THE prisoners were taken into and across a large cave-like hall, called in the manner of Chinese exaggeration the Hall of the Thousand Pillars, and contained perhaps fifty columns. At a far side of this they were halted before an open doorway while the Chinese guard talked shrilly among themselves for a time; then the under-officer entered the room where, through the doorway in the dim light of a lantern burning there, Heddon could see him bobbing and bowing, knees down, to a woman's gilt statue, apparently giving her thanks for the day's victory.

The prisoners were then taken on through the Hall of the Thousand Pillars and, after much winding and turning, were halted in a dismal place, very like a dungeon; and Heddon, looking about, thought that this dismal place was to be their prison. It was sunless, damp, foul with bad smells, and none too large for the eight prisoners.

There was the seaman, Mills, who had a protruding yellow tooth; the stupid grin that was usually on his face had been glazed over with a look of fear. And the seaman, Todd, who had a broken shoulder; he made sounds as if trying to pray with a throat too dry for words. And the seaman, Frankel, a dull fellow, now terrified, and breathing noisily through open mouth as he cast his glances about and begged first one then another of his companions to know, "Wot they goin' do to us? Wot they goin' a-do?"

Vioux blubbered in French, whined, cursed, prayed, scratched his cheeks, and stared fearfully with tears running out of his eyes. He amused the Chinamen, delighted them, by yelling and dodging from under any sword's flourish. He got behind Heddon and tried to cling to Heddon's arm, and though shaken off would return. Heddon lifted his fist and faced about, meaning to strike; but the wretched Vioux was so small and hysterical that Heddon only swore at him. Madame seemed in a stupor, as if she saw nothing, felt nothing, and did not think; she looked down and would not lift her face, but though looking at the ground she had stumbled often. Twice Heddon had caught her, steadied her for a time, then let go.

Raeburn was silent, badly frightened, but if more frightened he would have been silent before Old Tom, who blinked his red-rimmed eyes at the Chinese, would not dodge when they flashed steel at him, and swore at them viciously.

"Lad—" this from Old Tom to Young Raeburn—"I've been like a daddy, me an' Ol' Bill both, to you, an' if y' whimper I'll be 'shamed I ever liked ye! Look at him there—" pointing to Vioux—"an' see what it's like not to be a man. An' them others there, —— swabs!"

One of the Chinese had gone away and after a long time, during which the others squatted about talking and smoking, he returned with two lanterns and a torch made of twisted palm leaves and gum. These were lighted; then the Chinese talked excitedly for five minutes, pointing one at another. At last a Chinese, with an air of angry impatience, snatched the torch from the man who held it and started off. Others yelled at the prisoners and pointed, indicating they were to follow the man with the torch.

Presently they entered a dim narrow passage that wound about crookedly. The stones they walked on were overlaid with moist silt, the walls were black and wet; often the torchlight flickered down as if into a black mirror and the guide would step into slime.

Soon he stopped, afraid. He thought it some one's else turn to take the torch and lead the way. His companions jeered him, and after much loud quarreling, he started on, took a few steps, then stopped resolutely, and all quarreled again. Finally the fellow poked the torch at Heddon and gesticulated. Heddon understood that he was to lead the way, and the Chinese squeezed past the prisoners and fell into a rear place among his companions who presently began shouting to frighten off the devils; and echoes from far down the black passage came back to them like the jeering voices of demons.

Heddon at times had to crouch, the stones were that low overhead; he could not see much farther ahead than he could reach, and everything was covered with slime and stank. The slime deepened. The footing was slippery. Behind him men fell to their knees and arms deep into muck.

"Hy Will! Will!" Raeburn called.

Heddon turned back, pressed among the men. Raeburn and Old Tom were supporting Madame, who seemed to have fainted. The Chinese were screeching. The seaman, Todd, yelled in sudden pain. One of the Chinese had jabbed him by way of urging the prisoners on. Men howled that they were to be murdered here.

"——!" said Heddon, striking to right and left, facing back and clearing a way, "it's not worth it! Life don't mean that much to me. Come on, you men! If we're going to be put in this sort of hole we might as well make 'em cut us—"

Men caught at him gropingly, begged for him to go on, said they would all be killed. Madame's sobbing moan was heard through the insane noise. Old Tom shouted—

"Turn the light here—she's dyin'!"

The Chinese yelled shrilly and in the light of the lanterns they carried they brandished their swords. The thing, and only thing, that checked Heddon from crowding back upon the Chinese was the thought that among the pirates on the island there might be friends who would make a fight for T'eeay Layeen.

Heddon knew of Chinese cruelty, had seen Chinese prisons, and was now convinced that if he and the other prisoners were being driven into some far hole where even the guards were fearful about following, that it was intended they should be left to starve. There were many kinds of death that Heddon would more readily have chosen than that of starvation, but hope flickered in even this dismal place.

He turned again, lowered the smoky torch and peered at Madame. She had not fainted, but was held up on either side by Old Tom and Raeburn, and did look as if she might be dying. He caught hold of her and started on.

III

PRESENTLY Heddon stopped, doubtfully. His foot had stepped upon something that was not stone or earth. It was bamboo, a kind of bamboo grating. This was black and slick with slime. The slime squished through under his weight, his weight and Madame's. He walked carefully. The bamboos were strong and about as thick as his forearm. He stepped from the grating upon stone, and waded ankle-deep in slime; then in three steps came up against a stone wall. The ceiling was too low for him to stand upright. He turned to right and left. The passage had ended in a small vault of chilling rock, but somewhere thereabout must have been cracks that opened to the outer air for the torch smoke wavered as if in a slight draught.

Here was nothing but rock and mud, no bench, no stool, nothing but slick black walls, a stench, and a foot of slimy seepage. The other prisoners were being crowded across the bamboo. They came in silence, like men who have wearily reached the last of a long journey.

Half-way across the six-foot bamboo grating, Seaman Todd, whose shoulder was broken, and who had been wounded in the back, turned suddenly and stumbled back toward the Chinese, with hand out, begging. Perhaps they thought he was rushing upon them, or perhaps they knew what he was doing and did not care; anyhow, against the glow of the lanterns they carried, the fall of swords could be seen. They cut him down and hacked him, striking as men flail grain. Then they heaved up the grating, drew it toward them, and a moment later pushed his body into the slime. They held up their lanterns, peering down, but nothing could be seen but the smooth black surface, so quickly did this ooze have done with burial.

The Chinese went off hurriedly, in silence, their bare feet were noiseless; their shadows danced like devils in the lantern light that grew dim, then vanished at an angle.

Heddon held down the torch. The six foot jump across that hole would have been no jump at all for him; but to try it would be to dash his head against the low rock ceiling, and no man could drag his body through that sucking mud. There was no escape.

Heddon held the smoky flame to all sides of the rock-walled hole, and all sides were covered with dripping scum. There was no place to sit except in the ooze on the floor. He paused, peering at those huddled there, now woe-struck, afraid, dazed. Six men and one woman, huddled together where the sun had never been, and left to starve.

"Mister! Mister!" the man, Frankel, gasped, "the earth shakes! Wot's to 'come of us? Ow God, ow!"

Men coughed. The smoke was strong, and the slight draught did not carry it off. The torch was half burned out.

"Ain't they no dry place?" Old Tom asked angrily. Madame leaned quite as if lifeless against the wall, young Raeburn held her; and Tom had cast about for a place where she might sit. She was still a woman to these men whom she had hated.

All of them backed against the walls and stood wearily, their eyes fixed on the dying torch as if upon hope itself. The smoke increased. All were coughing, yet all wanted that tiny flame to burn on and on. Some gasped, making the sounds of prayer. Little Vioux constantly scratched his cheeks. The unaccustomed beard which he was growing that he might be a coffee planter in Paris itched, and absently he scratched with fingers covered with mud. Madame groaned wearily.

The torch had burned to a glow. The darkness deepened. Stifling smoke rolled upward. Suddenly Heddon stooped and thrust the butt of the torch into the ooze at his feet. There was an instant's angry sizzle, then darkness—black as the darkness before God molded the sun between His hands and spoke the Word—came upon them. This darkness was like a physical presence, with weight in it; it seemed thick to breathe and had the stench and chill of a newly broken tomb. They drew their breath in a gasp, and held it in a moment's silence, filled with awe. No one was hardly more than an arm's reach off from any other, but so sightless were they that it was as if a black vastness lay between; so dread-shocked that they hung in a moment's stupor such as must come to men in that first moment when suddenly disembodied by death they float out into the chill darkness that lies between earth and the Judgment Hall of Hell.

Then Mills coughed; Frankel, so long had he held his breath, gasped like a man rising out of deep water; Madame moaned and Vioux tried to pray. In the midst of this one clear loud word was spoken in rage, bafflement, mockery. Old Tom said—

"Treasure!"

IV

THERE were groans, curses, sighs, and the chatter of teeth; fear and cold laced their bodies with shivery aches. The ground vibrated to the jar of the ocean; this had the *feel* of earthquake, and with it the sensation of being trapped under heavy stones that would likely be dislodged. In the blackness voices made sounds without speaking, but Raeburn spoke—

"I'd rather be dead!"

Heddon, fumbling at the boy's waist, said—

"No words like that out of you!"

"It's how I feel!" Mills cried.

Frankel shouted as if calling to men far off—

"Wot they goin' do with us?"

Old Tom answered:

"You can be cur'ous if you want about what nex'. I ain't. This here is plenty!"

Vioux suddenly began yelling and splashing about. Some trickling of slime, like a creeping thing, had set him frantic. Like a man in delirium tremens, he cried in French and English—

"Take it off! Take it off!"

It was frightfully cold, with a chill that mercury would not have shown, for there was much fear in the chill.

Hours went by. The thought of not

having food made men, who were too dismally sickened to eat, moan that they were starved. Heddon had Madame on one side of him, Raeburn on the other. Heddon must stoop for the rocks overhead were low. He held an arm about the boy, a hand to Madame's arm.

"Will, I'm a rotten coward!" young Raeburn said between chattering teeth.

"It's chilly, lad. That's all. Cold."

V

TIME crawled by them without form, as if it were not time at all; without turn of sun or tick of clock, hours may have sneaked along like minutes, or minutes may have seemed many hours. There was nothing but weariness by which they might judge time, and the weariness became so great that even Heddon at last slid down in the ooze, his back against the rock, and seemed to doze in chill dreams in which he dreamed that he was awake and could not doze.

Raeburn lay against him and slept, and Heddon, for something to do, and because he liked the boy, chaffed his arms and hands as if trying to keep the lad's body warm enough that life should not slip away. Madame too wearily lay against Heddon, and must have slept, for at times she lay heavily; and knowing his own chill stiffness and cramp-like aches, Heddon understood what the others must be suffering. He, himself, was drunk with weariness.

In their uneasy dozing the other men were not silent, and broke out of bad dreams with groans or startled yells. The seaman, Mills, had become a madman, or so like one that the others thought him mad, and at times would rush blunderingly about, yelling that he could not stand it longer, would not; he trampled and stumbled over other men's legs, fell, howling.

"You fool," Heddon shouted at him, "this is only a mud-hole in the dark! All things end. We'll either get out or die. Either way it's not worth all this yeowling. Shut up!"

Vioux after hours of whimpering and praying had grown quiet. It may have been one day, or two days, or only so many hours, when Old Tom spoke up, saying—

"I ain't heard 'im f'r long time, Will."

"Let him sleep."

"Maybe he's gone an' died!"

"Well," Heddon growled, "what's that but sleep?"

"What d'ye think of Will, in this long silence?"

"Silence? With Frankel blubbering, and Mills howling? The only way I know this woman here against me is not dead is by the moans and sighs that break from time to time. And you, muttering. Call it silence!"

"Me, I put the time in killin' Chinks! Them's warmin' thoughts. I've killed Pelew three times now!"

"Steady on there! Don't let your brain turn bottom up. Men have had worse than this. I've heard old convicts talk—I think of what they've told. Black wet dungeons and they lay in irons, with bodies raw from the whip. This is bad, but they had worse—and lived."

"Will?"

"Now what?"

"Y' believe in God?"

"Aye."

"Then don't He hate these —— Chinks?"

"Does he? He could touch this island with His finger and it would sink."

"But some prayer, Will? Mightn't it help, you think?"

"If there is a God he hates a coward. I won't beg now."

"Aye," said Old Tom, understandingly, and became quiet.

TO BE CONTINUED.

Deliverance

In which the author Looks into the Souls of the Hill-Billies

By Fiswoode Tarleton

NOON atop Porky Ridge! Autumn noon. The Collets eating silently in their cabin that stands under wind-swept laurels, mountain ash and cucumber-trees. Coppery red and ocher-tinted leaves whirling outside, blowing against the cabin, some clinging to the cabin like bright wings. The pink fruit of the cucumber-trees falling, plucked by the wind.

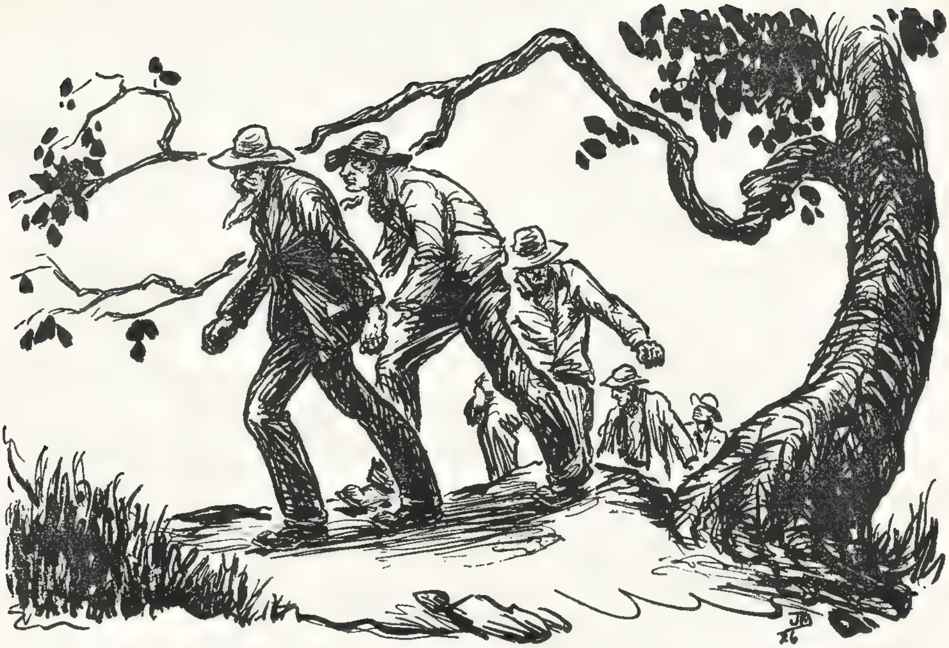
The revolving victual-tabletop thumps and groans and creaks as the thumbs and forefingers of the eaters give it a spin. Grace and rhythm in the whip of wrists that brings the salt, sugar, hog-meat, hominy, corn dodger or chicory-coffee in front of Paw Collet, Maw, or the girl, Esther. Arms lie heavy and awkward on the table while it's still, lift clear of the dishes and victuals mechanically when it revolves. Hands hold eating knives clumsily; hands seem heavy, arms too long. But there's a flare of rhythm when a hand spins the table.

Too big now for what is left of the Collet family, the table was made before the other children married and went to live on Misery or Cone Mountain. Before Ed, the youngest boy, married out of the district, became a lowlander, lost caste.

Ed, the deserter, is sticking in his Maw's mind now while her eyes are glued to one spot on the table as if she were crystal-gazing. As if she were seeing him working way off on the railroad. She has a vague, unsettled picture in her mind of railroad cars, puffing engines, and gleaming rails that to her seem to strike out like copperhead-snakes. Images change before her mind's eye. Maw Collet's never seen steam-cars and locomotives. Sometimes she imagines them as small cabins on wheels, sometimes as large, long wagons with seats and a smoking stove in front, her boy, Ed, feeding the stove with wood.

She knows that railroad trains bring Government men to Anathoth and that they drive or ride over to Porky and Misery to snoop on hill folks. It's only thirteen miles from Porky to Anathoth but it might as well be a hundred. It's outside the district, her clan's district. Bounded by Leeston seven miles away on the west. By Misery Mountain four miles east. Cone Mountain five miles south and Little Porky Ridge three miles to the north. Within these bounds Porky folks stay mostly. May be walls beyond. Strange peoples. Strange animals. Maw Collet's mind can't come to grips with anything beyond.

Esther eats slowly, and now and then



throws glances at her Maw, sees that her eyes are fixed on the table, crystal-gazing again. The girl knows that her Maw is seeing steam-cars and Ed. That's what always makes her Maw slow in eating; making long pictures in her mind between bites.

When Paw Collet turns the table with a whip of wrist it isn't because he wants anything more to eat. He hasn't hardly touched his victuals. The girl sees a timidity in her Paw's eyes. His hands are getting restless. Her Paw's nervous glances at her Maw tell the girl that he's got some news and is afraid to spring it. It's that way whenever he comes home from wood-cutting to tell them that Government men are stumbling through the district. It must be worse than that now, the way he's squirming in his chair, glancing at her maw, trying to find the spunk to speak. Her Paw's a peaceful Collet, gutless Collet, mountain men say. Now he's opening his mouth slightly, then closing it again. Her Maw's eyes are looking daggers at her mind's pictures. The girl's eyes are curious; they settle on her Paw. Blue eyes that reach, that pull. He can speak to Esther. He lets go of a few words, but leans forward as he speaks as if he'd like to swallow them.

"Wal, gal, we-uns 'er a-goin' tuh have a road. Hain't we?"

Casual, the way he says it. The girls' eyes open wider. Her Maw looks up from the table slowly, a little dazed, as if coming out of a dream. Her eyes look sharply at Paw Collet pretty soon, at Esther questioningly, then sharply back at her man again.

"War yuh a-talkin', ol' man?"

"War jes' a-mentionin' tha new road."

Maw Collet frowns at the girl and doesn't pay any attention to her man for a minute. She thinks that Esther has kept something from her; easy to see that; and Esther shakes her head and squirms some under the suspicion fastened on her. Her Paw is up to his old trick of pretending that she and her maw know all about a thing before he springs it. Seems to be easier for him to speak about disagreeable things if he tacks on his "hain't we's" or "hain't hit's."

The blankness in Esther's eyes is read by her Maw who looks back at the table. Maw Collet clears a space on the table for her elbows to rest on, a sign that she is going to tuck her face in her two palms, fasten two hard eyes on her man. To the girl it always seems that her Maw impales her Paw with her eyes, sticks him like a frog.

This time Maw Collet even brushes the crumbs from the spot cleared on the table before she sets down her elbows and puts her head between her palms.

Esther's Paw is squirming. Plain that he wants to go back to his wood-cutting but doesn't dare.

"What road air yuh a-talkin' 'bout, ol' man?"

"Tha new road thar aimin' tuh build over Porky. Hain't yuh heerd?"

Maw Collet runs her fingers through her hair and looks at the back wall of the cabin. The girl's mouth opens. Paw Collet looks at the door as if he'd like to jump through it. There is a minute of silence, a closing-in silence, the kind that follows an explosion.

Her face between her palms again, Maw Collet pins her man again with her eyes.

"Yuh reckon we'uns air voodoo doctors? 'At we'uns kin read what air doin' ever'-whar?"

"Git a-goin', Paw," says the girl.

"Wal." Paw Collet settles a little in his chair. The first bolt is fired and he feels easier. He talks to Esther. "Thar a-goin' tuh turn the Leeston road over Porky 'stead o' through the swamp. Hit's likely a-goin' right past hyar. Follow tha ridge top from end to end. 'At's tuh git rid o' gittin' stuck. Wagons an' mules an' hosses gittin' stuck I mean. Huh. Reckoned you-uns knowed 'bout hit."

Maw Collet's eyes are stepping around the cabin. Now they peer out the window. Esther's too. The two women seem to see the road already there. When they face Paw Collet again their cheeks are red and their eyes flash. Paw Collet is pinned by four eyes now.

"What-uns air a-thinkin' tuh make a road on our ridge?" says Maw.

"Dunno. Lessen hit's tha county jedges. 'At's all I know. What I said."

"Whar'd yuh hear hit?" Maw Collet asks.

" 'Bout tha road yuh mean?"

"Air we'uns a-talkin' 'bout critters an' ghosts? Reckon hit war roads yore paw mentioned, gal. War hit?"

"Poke yoreself, Paw."

"Wal." He shifts his chair around and looks at the door. "Ol' man Bodie's been tuh Leeston. Met tha ol' man a-hustlin' through the timber. Ol' man didn't stop. Jes' hollered 'bout tha road. He war a-headin' fer tha Wellcome cabin. Reckon he'll drop in hyar arter a while."

"Air we-uns a-goin' tuh set quiet while thar a-trespassin' on our ridge?" Maw Collet glances at the girl; she's expecting her to say something.

"Air we-uns a-goin' tuh let 'em make a highway along our ridge, Paw?"

Paw Collet scratches his head.

"Cain't do much tuh stop 'em ef tha law says go ahead. A road air a funny thing, childers. Hit air!"

Twisting the corner of her mouth Maw Collet nods at the girl. The girl nods back. Everything told in these nods of her Maw's at such times. And in the closing of her eyes that follow. Ever since Esther can remember, since she was six or seven, those nods have been full of meaning. And her Maw always glances at her Paw with a penetrating, gripping look before she makes that sign to the girl, as if she were taking her Paw's soul out of his body and laying it out plain before the girl. "See what your Maw hitched to! No back-bone!" This is what her eyes and her nods seem to say.

Now Maw Collet is looking Esther up and down. From head to foot. Another sign. Pride in it. Meaning Esther takes after her Maw. A fighting Collet because of the Taney strain, her Maw's blood clan. "Fightendest" folks that ever lived. Esther was raised on tales of their daring. Their cunning. Their worship of the blood. Way back across seas and way back in time the Taney chronicles dip. Tales handed down from generation to generation. Tales of riches and daring and danger that make her blood pound to think of. Feudal barons. Deulists and chieftains and hunters. Her Maw's great-pappy helped storm King's Mountain. Hell-drove the British clear to Yorktown.

And again it runs through Esther's mind that it was her Maw who taught her to hunt the black bear and the deer. The wildcat. Taught her how to bark squirrels and outguess the wily fox. And she taught her aloofness. Told her that all men outside the district were to be snubbed. Never feared. Never trusted. Porky Ridge is a chosen land, the land of the Taneys, Wellcomes, Bodies—families tied by blood. A clan that all folks in the district feared. And the belle of the district is Esther.

Such thoughts continue in Esther's mind until her Paw rises from his chair and steps over to the door. He moves slowly, uncertainly, as if he's expecting to be called back. He stands over by the door as if he were supporting a load; as if her Maw's looks and frowns rest heavy on his shoulders. Opening the door a little at a time, he slides out. A gust of wind enters and is sucked into the stove with a roar. The door closes. The two women sit shaking their heads at each other. Maw Collet fills her pipe and lights it. The blue string of smoke is drawn across the cabin to the stove by the draft. Something for both women to watch. It lightens the silence between them.

AFTER a while Maw Collet straightens up in her chair. Her head is cocked and her ears are listening. The girl strains her hearing but catches nothing but familiar sounds; the mountain wind whining around the eaves and its endless tapping of the roof with a tree branch. Esther wishes she could hear as her Maw can. When her Maw cocks her head there's sure to be something about. Maybe only a hill dog, a strayed hog, or a Porky man coming from over the other side of the ridge and passing their cabin on his way down the slope to Singing Springs. Sometimes it's only her Paw coming home through the laurel. Her Maw hears everything. With a study of sounds the girl could never quite grasp, day or night, when she even appears to be asleep her Maw will rise suddenly in her cot-bed, touch Esther with a finger and they will both listen. When feuds break out fresh or Government men become daring enough to venture on Porky, her Maw is as alert as a hound with pups.

A call comes from outside and Esther goes to the door. Opens it a crack. Instinctively her right hand clutches the muzzle of the rifle-gun leaning against the wall, then releases it. She opens the door a foot and returns to her seat.

"Hit's ol' Bodie," she says.

Her Maw nods as if she knew it without being told. Both women sit up straighter when Adam Bodie steps in. He closes the door softly after him, takes Paw Collet's empty chair. He glances at the victual table and moves his chair over to eat pone and wild honey. His spin of the table to bring the honey within reach is awkward. Things are upset. His palsied right hand knocks over the honey jar twice before he can get his spoon through the opening. His stiff middle finger wags as his hand carries the spreaded pone to his mouth. The women are silent while he eats.

When he's finished he moves his chair up close to them. They lean forward. Both rest their elbows on their knees and rest their faces in their hands.

"Been tuh Leeston!" The way he says this, in a slow deliberate whisper, seems calculated to throw the two women into suspense. And as if this isn't enough he looks back of him through the window, at the door, then taps both their knees with his middle finger. He looks from one to the other. Their mouths open slightly.

"Heerd heaps in Leeston. More'n hit's good fer we-uns to know lessen we-uns want war."

Again he looks from one to the other. He's working up to things step by step. This oracle and old warrior of the hills, no longer able to hit anything with a rifle-gun, is still a master at working up an atmosphere of war. The suspense created in the two women already glows in their eyes; warms *him* like wine. His cheeks are red under his beard. Mostly he watches Esther's eyes, a grin without humor playing on his face. He'd make the spell last all afternoon if he could; just say enough from time to time to keep up the suspense, to keep the girl's eyes glowing. But the two women are on to his tricks.

"Wal, we-uns air a-waitin'," says Maw Collet.

"Git a-goin'," says Esther.

Once more he looks at the door and out the window.

"Thar a-goin' tuh make a road 'cross Porky."

He leans forward as he says this and taps their knees with his middle finger. Tapping their knees is always a sign that he's about to spring big news. That they're to make ready. But they have been ready for a long time. Both women shift in their chairs. The girl rises and starts to clear off the victual table at a sign from her Maw.

The oracle is thus driven to give out the meat of his tale. Without the women looking directly at him, without Esther especially, he gets no thrill, his words sound hollow to him.

"Set down, gal. Hit's hard tuh fin' a startin' place. Thar's heaps tuh tell."

When the women are settled in their seats again, when Esther's eyes burn with youth and curiosity, he puts aside his stiff middle finger and tells them what he found out in Leeston, the facts about the road.

The road is the reason for the strange men looking through contraptions down near the end of the ridge, where the tail of the ridge dips down to the gap and Sleepy Knob. The road is the reason men wave at each other and drive stakes. Mysterious silent signals mean that the road is going to be turned away from the swamps and climb Porky where it's dry. Follow Porky's top to the north end and drop and wind around the hills to Leeston. Wide, hard road that wagons can pass each other on. Wide highway that will connect Leeston with Anathoth, the railroad town. A road that will take an automobile full of folks from town to town. Highway from unknown lands to unknown lands because the road beyond Anathoth and the one beyond Leeston will be connected. Highway will pass the Collet cabin less than a stone's throw away.

Leeston business stores are looking forward to big business. The hotel's going to be painted. Old man Steele's going to sell gasoline from a pump outside his general store. Fallon the druggist is going to have a new soda-water fountain. Twice a week they're going to make people play-act on a bed sheet.

All this has been going on while Porky folks were sleeping and feeling snug, Adam Bodie tells the two women. Leeston storekeepers have been hobnobbing with politicians, been getting together and demanding this road for six months while Porky was napping. Leeston storekeepers, except one, have been after county judges, road overseers, and even the governor. Threatening and vote-bribing. Every storekeeper but one has some scheme to make Leeston a big city into which money's going to flow like water. Paul Taney, Maw Collet's kinsman, is the only one who isn't conniving to attract invaders from foreign lands.

Adam Bodie pauses to undo his shirt collar and mop his face. The mouths of the two women are open wide and their eyes glow. When the atmosphere begins to thin, when the suspense begins to turn to impatience, he hauls his stiff finger over and taps their knees again.

"An' kin yuh guess what Leeston did tuh old man Paul Taney, yore kin? Jes' fer a-differin' with 'em?"

The women both shake their heads slowly. The oracle puts aside his finger. Waits until frowns of impatience come from them.

"Jailed tha ol' feller! 'At's what. Got Sheriff Floyd tuh lock Paul up. 'At's whar I had tuh see him."

Maw Collet points at the oracle with the stem of her pipe.

"Yuh mean 'at my Uncle Paul war locked up fer jes' differin' a mite?"

"Wal." Adam Bodie shifts in his chair, crosses his other leg, and scratches his beard. "Hit war this way: Yore Uncle Paul Taney, Porky Taney 'at is, an' ol' man Steele war a-glarin' 'cross tha road at each other fer a week maybe. Jes' a-lookin' guns, both war. Yuh see Steele was one o' tha ringleaders fer tha road. Steele bein' a lowlander and sot agin' hosses, mules, likker an' gun-fightin' war a-talkin' too much; he war a-talkin' too loud I mean. A-sayin' 'at meesheeny war better'n hosses, an' I dunno, a lot o' other fool talk, which Paul heard.

"Wal. Paul he began a-gunnin', jes' backed into his harness shop, fotched his gun out and began a-shootin' 'cross tha road. Huh! Lordamighty, childers! Hit didn't take long afore Main Street war empty. Ever'body—men, women an' childers a-runnin' fer cover. Yore uncle Paul jes' stood in front o' his shop, a-pepperin' tha windows of the general store. Street war like a dead yard till tha sheriff showed up. Sheriff Floyd says when he ran out tha cote house arter tha first shot an' looked down tha road thar warn't a sign o' life but hill hounds an' mules. A team o' hosses war on the run toward tha grove and town dogs scairt stiff war gone in a flash. Wal. O' course 'at had tuh stop. Hit looked like yore Uncle Paul war a-tryin' tuh shoot down old man Steele's store. Nobody war returnin' tha fire, Paul bein' a Porky man. Folks war afeared, I reckon, 'at ef tha old man war hurt we-uns git peeved.

"Geeamighty! Sheriff Floyd he came down Main Street. Slow like, poky like, an' a-smilin'. Warn't armed with nothin', an' *arms folded.* When Paul seed Floyd a-comin' he jes' backed in his shop an' barricaded hisself. Floyd says hit took a lot o' palaver afore Paul'd lissen tuh reason an' come outen tha door. Floyd not a-carin' tuh hurt tha old man. Wal. Arter a bit Paul went along. Let hisself git locked up.

"Old man Steele swore outen a warrant agin Paul fer a-breakin' peace. Tha Squire warn't any too happy a-makin' hit, Paul bein' a Porky man.

"Whole town's upset an' a-quiverin'. Goshamighty! Floyd tailed arter me clar out o' town, clar tuh tha knob, lessen I start a-gunnin'. Floyd says Paul's kep' in jail fer his own good. An' ef we-uns start a rumpus in Leeston hit'll be tha last. Won't any more Porky folks git in Leeston Sattiday evenin's. Hit'll be too fer and hot from whar we-uns er a-goin', says Floyd."

Adam Bodie mops his face and Maw Collet looks from him to the girl.

"Po' Paul hain't never a-goin' tuh lose his back-bone. Thar's a man, Esther, gal! That's whar yuh got yore spunk. 'At's Taney stock, 'at is! Same stock 'at stood tuh be skelped by Injuns an' not a whimper. Same blood 'at made hit hot fer tha Yankees. Same blood 'at went a-hellin' arter tha redcoats!"

Esther's cheeks are reddening. She is looking away from the other two. Old man Bodie is waiting for her eyes to come back. He has to see his words register before he can speak on.

"Lissen, gal!" He bends over closer and taps her knee with his middle finger again.

"Esther! Sot yore min'," says Maw Collet.

"Wal," begins old man Bodie when the girl looks at him. "I war 'bout tuh say 'at yore Uncle Paul spoke them thar very words 'at yore Maw spoke. 'Esther's jes' like me,' he says. 'Thar's a Taney, an' ef I said tha word she'd be a-leadin' tha hull o' Porky tuh Leeston tuh larn town folks 'at hit hain't a-goin' tuh do tuh trifle with thar kin. 'At's Esther an' 'at's her Maw,' says Paul. 'Fightendest two 'at ever lived. 'At's Taney wimmen!' "

Old man Bodie's eyes are wet and he wipes them with the back of his hand. The gesture makes the two women twitch and look away. All three are looking at different places around the cabin. Eyes seem to dodge each other. Sentiment has crept into things. Atmosphere's getting sugary. All act as if they've done something they shouldn't have. As if they've violated a code.

With a stern look Maw Collet brings the oracle back to the subject of the new Leeston road.

Eyes meet again when old man Bodie tells them that the widening of the road and sending it over Porky Ridge instead of through the swamps means invasion. Means nothing else. Means a highway across Porky cluttered with automobiles, "chug-wagons" full of strangers invading the district. Strangers stopping to ask questions at mountain cabins. Federal men rolling in regularly. Folks on mules or horses or afoot won't dare travel the road. Hill hounds lying in the middle of the road will be run over. Game will be frightened away to remoter districts. Porky folks won't be able to call their souls their own if the road goes through.

The oracle pauses and watches the women, his right elbow resting on his knee and his stiff finger pointing upward. Maw Collet is looking out the window and up the timbered slope of the ridge. He sees that she is picturing the invaders coming. Her eyes are flashing. Her right fist resting on her knee is closed so tight that the skin is white on knuckles. When her trigger finger slowly unfolds and closes again he knows she's gunning in her mind, and when her eyes step from point to point or from tree to tree he knows she's laid an invader low and is getting the drop on another. Old man Bodie's own picture is vivid to him. He's seeing the scene he has word-painted for the women.

Esther is looking out the window, too. Her right hand is twitching and her eyes stepping. Looks as if she were laying strangers low in the laurel. He doesn't move for fear of cooling the fires. His ecstasy is complete because he doesn't feel a discordance in the girl; it escapes him that he's fastened war on beauty, that he's given talons to the peacock.

Old man Bodie pulls his stiff finger over a little nearer their knees. He's ready to add more fuel if the fires cool. He's keeping things at white heat.

But Maw Collet has a coughing spell and rises to get a dipper of water from the bucket by the table. She drinks, sets the dipper half full of water within reach, and sits down. She folds her hands in her lap and the girl does likewise. The oracle taps their knees again. They stiffen to attention. The pots and pans on the high shelf seem to be listening. There is a brief lull in the wind.

"We-uns air a-waitin'," says Maw Collet.

"Git a-goin'," says Esther.

"Huh!" Old man Bodie puts his finger away and throws glances at the door and window. "What yuh reckon thar a-goin' tuh do with Singin' Springs water?"

Esther and her Maw look at each other,

then at the water in the dipper. They see him pulling his finger over. The girl slaps at it.

"Yo're a poky speecher," says her Maw.

"*Wal,* thar a-goin' tuh sell hit. Thar a-goin' tuh put hit in jugs and sell hit. Thar a-goin' tuh cart hit to Anathoth and tha railroad's a-goin' tuh fotch hit ever'-whar tuh lowlanders."

The eyebrows of the two woman knit. Maw Collet looks at the water in the dipper again. She reaches down and flicks the water with her finger.

" 'At? 'At's what thar a-goin' tuh git money fer? Jes' common water?"

"Shore. Haul hit over tha new road an' bottle hit in Anathoth. *Hit hain't common water!*"

Maw Collet takes a drink, tasting as she swallows. The girl tastes it and passes the dipper to the oracle. The dipper is passed around like a communion cup from one to another.

"Thar a-goin' tuh call tha new road tha Singin' Springs road. I bet, by doggies, 'cause hit sounds high-flootin'."

"Huh," says Maw Collet and rests her face in her palms. She blinks her eyes. The oracle is making pictures too fast. Invaders are too thick for her to follow. She sees nothing but a blur. The world's going topsy-turvy before the girl, too. Porky Ridge seems to be dropping away.

The women taste the water again, bent on finding its secret.

The oracle taps their knees.

"Wal, we-uns air a-goin' tuh stop 'em. Time tuh do hit's now. 'At's what! Why? Huh!" The oracle starts to tap their knees again but they stop him. "Wal, tha furriners cain't build a road lessen they lay hit out with stakes an' they cain't drive stakes lessen they look through 'at contraption o' thar's. Geeamighty, thar's somethin' 'bout 'at air contraption 'at's funny. Tha furriners don' know whar thar a-goin' lessen they peek through it. Hit air funny, shore!"

The two women sit immovable as old man Bodie rises and stands. Mountain gusts shake the cabin, moan around the eaves, squeal in the chimney like rats. Puffs of smoke come out through the cracks in the stove, spiral and are sucked back. A tree branch beats a tattoo on the roof. A hound dog bays as he encircles the cabin. His bayings are lifted by the wind and string away through the high laurel.

"Hit air funny," says the oracle buttoning his coat.

Gloom on the faces of Esther and her Maw. Doom in the solemn words that old man Bodie is measuring out now. Letting go of words slowly, throwing more fuel on the two fires already at white heat. Invaders are at hand. Vanguard creeping up the ridge since morning. Road's going to make a highway of their ridge. Going to be taken away from the swamp where the niggers live. White folks' land to be invaded, niggers to be free men.

Old man Bodie steps over toward the door. He cocks his head and scratches his beard, thinking. Pretty soon he pulls a booklet from his pocket, steps back to the women. He opens it up and lays it on Maw Collet's lap. Pictures of automobiles with folks in them. Everything colored. Lowlanders dressed smart are waving from the cars, and smiling. Smiling up at Maw Collet and Esther. Two cars. One with a man, woman and two children. The woman's pink scarf streams backward with the wind. The dresses of the children, one blue the other white, are fluttering. A man in the other car. Young. He's in white pants and a blue and white striped coat that flutters. He is hatless but his hair defies the wind; it lies smooth and parted. His lips are parted.

The oracle reaches for the booklet, closes it and points to some lettering on the outside cover with his stiff fingers.

"Kin yuh reckon what 'at says, 'at air word-writin'?"

Esther and her Maw bend low and squint. Esther knows a few letters but she's slow.

"Cain't," her Maw says for her. "What's hit say?"

"Huh. Hit says Ed Steele, Agent." The oracle straightens up and looks around the cabin, cocks his head as if he were telling a cabin full of folks; gazes at the high shelf, seems to say to the pots and pans, "Thar yuh air!"

Esther opens the folder but old man Bodie closes it and puts his finger on the lettering again.

"Thar yuh air. Ed Steele. He haint fitten tuh live. A-tryin' tuh drive Paul outen business!"

Maw Collet's forefinger is slowly opening the folder again but it slips from her knee and falls to the floor. The women let it lie. They fix their eyes on the stove, watch the puffs of smoke shoot out between the warped stove lids, spiral, and be drawn back into the stove.

Old man Bodie steps over near the door and stands. The women don't look up. The oracle is fingering his chin. His brows are knitted. His eyes close to slits and look at Maw Collet and Esther, at the booklet on the floor. The fire has left their eyes. Their sinews are relaxing. They are cooling. Puzzlement is on his face. His head swings slowly in a circle. His eyes seem to question the almanac, the pots and pans on the high shelf, the old muzzle-loader hanging on the wall. When his eyes come back to the women they seem to feel them. Maw Collet shifts in her chair and the girl pulls at her fingers. The oracle seems to be waiting for something when Esther throws him a glance. She rises and steps over near him, picks up the rifle-gun. Throws the lever; sees that the magazine is full and closes it.

"Hit's all hunky," she says.

" 'At's hit, gal! 'At's Taney women!"

He opens the door a crack, peers out through force of habit. The stove roars from the draft. The two women are looking at the stove. When the roar stops suddenly they both look around. The oracle has slipped out.

ESTHER steps over to the window and watches him winding his way up the ridge until he disappears through a clump of pines. He's heading for the cabins on the other side of the ridge, she thinks. The Daniels, Bodies, Taneys and Wellcomes in turn will be aroused. War brewing!

The girl returns to her chair. Maw Collet rises to clear the victual table. She carries the dishes over to the bench by the stove a few at a time. On her trips back to the table from the bench she throws glances at the folder on the floor. And on her Maw's trips from the table to the bench Esther's eyes dart at the folder, lift again when her Maw turns. See-saw of eyes. Eyes never meeting. Timed so they'll not clash.

Maw Collet throws fresh wood on the fire, crowds the stove to empty the woodbox. She throws the draft, opens the draft wider, and the rats squeal again.

"Honey, fotch yore Maw some fire-wood."

Rising, the girl steps over to the door. She opens it a crack, slowly, and steps out. She stands still for a minute. The wind whips her petticoat and hair. Leaves whirl and light on her, clutching her like bright wings. A cucumber-fruit blows against her bare foot faintly reflecting a blush on her skin.

She makes her way around the cabin and stoops as she comes to the window. Then cautiously she straightens up and peers in. Her Maw has the booklet opened up on the victual table and is staring at it. Stooping again the girl leaves the window and continues on to the wood-pile. She loads her arms and returns around the cabin to the door. She calls and the door is opened for her.

When she dumps the wood into the box she returns to her chair. The booklet has been placed back on the floor, on exactly the same spot. Her Maw is scraping pans. Reaching or scraping she keeps her face fixed on the wall back of the stove. Her body turns, her hands grope for pans on the bench or victual dishes, but her head remains fixed. Esther's Maw is giving her a chance to look at the pictures. It's plain.

The girl reaches down for the booklet and unfolds it on her lap. The smiles of the young man with the flowing tie and fluttering striped coat seem to reach up. Strange his hair isn't blown by the wind. She holds the booklet at different angle now, holds it down and up and away from her, the full length of her arm. The eyes seem to turn in the young man's head, fixing themselves always on her. Two red spots appear on her cheeks.

Maw Collet drops a pan. The clatter makes Esther jump and lay the booklet on the floor, folded. Her Maw's hand fishes around for the pan she's dropped, her head is still. She's fumbling things because she's in a hurry. The girl notices her Maw's haste and rises to help her.

"Reckon yuh better scamper down tha ridge an' take a peek, gal. Best tuh go quiet-like an' don' start nothin', yit. Yore Maw's a-goin' tuh yore Aunt Hattie's fer some white flour. I reckon I'll make we-uns some cookies this evenin'."

Esther thinks her Maw's hurrying a lot just to go and beg white flour from her Aunt Hattie. She'd like to know what's in her Maw's mind that makes her fumble the pots and pans, spill water, and splash soapsuds over everything. The girl stands still and looks at her Maw, who turns pretty soon and tells her to "git along."

The girl picks up the rifle-gun as she goes out the cabin door. Closing the door after her, she crosses the small clearing, sliding her bare feet one after the other along the ground so as not to prick them on the stub. She enters a break in the scrub, walks along the narrow trail for a short distance, then turns abruptly into the laurel bushes. She lies flat and listens. She worms her way back toward the cabin until she can see the door through the brush, and waits.

Stalking her own Maw! Spying on her blood! But isn't her Maw making secrets? Isn't she mistrusting her gal? Her Maw is wrapping herself in mystery. Her Maw doesn't trust her. Doesn't trust her about what? Why, about the change coming in things! Her Maw isn't sure that she, her gal, feels a passing of old things. It seems to be just *things*, a shedding of *things* she can't name. The laurel-trees letting go of their leaves must feel as she feels. But the laurels know what they're losing.

Now the cabin door is opening slowly. Her Maw's head appears, eyes throwing looks around the clearing, trying to penetrate the timber and the scrub on all sides. Esther's Maw wants to make sure she's gone.

Big and mysterious must be the business her Maw is setting out upon. When she steps out of the cabin and closes the door she creeps around the cabin. She is carrying the booklet with both hands, holding it in front of her like a plate of victuals, carefully, like an offering; the way she carries white flour cookies in a pan to her kin sometimes.

Passing the wood-pile, Maw Collet enters the mouth of the trail made by countless comings and goings of Porky folks. Esther can only see her Maw's head now as it moves along the top of the scrub. The girl rises and follows, carefully. Past the cabin and the wood-pile. Fleetly but cautiously she cuts diagonally through the timber. She comes to a stop in a patch of scrub pine. Thus screened she has a view of her Maw again going down the trail which runs straight for a hundred yards.

The wind is blowing her Maw's hair straight back and flapping her petticoat; the wind is curiously turning the corners of the booklet her Maw holds with stiff outstretched arms. Maw Collet's head jerks suddenly to the right or left from time to time as if something has flicked the tail of her eye. When this happens she pauses for a second as if she is identifying something. It is the fallen pink fruit of the cucumber-tree, lying in the trail, on either side of the bordering scrub or sometimes caught in the laurel scrub that catches her Maw's eye. As many times as Maw Collet's seen these blushes in the autumns, she ought to know them. Strange that she has to investigate every time the fallen fruit whips her eye. It's as if she sees it as something else on the first flick. Light pink. Maw Collet's favorite color. Blush pink. The same tint as the scarf worn by the lady in the whisking automobile!

Maw Collet stops now and opens the booklet. She stares at it long and hard before she proceeds around a sharp turn in the trail. Esther creeps forward through the brush until her Maw's in sight again. Her Maw must be heading for the Suddith cabin. Once more she stops. Stops where there's an open vista through the timber from the trail to the top of the ridge. Esther's Maw is looking intently up through the vista. Her eyes seem to be following something that moves across the top of Porky. Her eyes follow the ridge-top to a certain point on her right, then move back and follow it again; she seems to be picking up something with her mind's eye. Esther's Maw is seeing things with her mind's eye. Must be her mind's eye. The girl can see nothing on the ridge-top.

The wind snaps off a tree branch, throws it down in front of Maw Collet. She jumps slightly, then moves on. The girl follows, making her way from cover to cover, from tree to tree. She can see her Maw plainly now. There's no scrub for quite a distance. She can see her Maw's head jerk every few feet. It always jerks to the left, quick looks up at the top of Porky. There's no cucumber-fruit lying about. There are no cucumber-trees; only mountain ash and hickory with patches of pine.

Once more her Maw stops. She calls. The girl moves up to where she can see the door of the Suddith cabin, crawls into a clump of holly bushes. She sees the door open a crack, then a little more and a little more. Ann Suddith's head comes out. She sees Maw Collet and beckons for her to come in. Still holding the booklet like an offering, Esther's Maw covers the fifteen feet to the door briskly. She throws a quick glance at the top of Porky just before she slides into the cabin.

Squatting among the holly bushes, the girl waits for a while after the door closes. When she moves again she makes a wide circle through the beeches below the Suddith cabin and approaches it from the rear. She can hear voices as she crawls under the cabin, pushing her rifle-gun ahead of her. The rough floor creaks above her; then voices come.

Ann Suddith is telling her man to fetch water from the spring. Pretty soon the girl sees his booted feet step down from the stoop and move off through the beechwoods, down the ridge-side toward Singing Springs.

There is a moment of quiet in the cabin, then the tread of feet moving to the door. Somebody must be looking out. Again the tread of feet moving back from the door. The feet stop right over Esther's head. Voices come—

"Hain't hit purty!"

The voice of Ann Suddith's Maw. The shut-in. Bed-ridden Cora lying on her cot-bed for twenty years. Only able to turn her head to look out the small window facing the ridge-top. Waiting through the winters for the summers to come, and bring a family of king-birds to nest in the aged apple-tree she can see from the window, to rule the whole locality. Never allowing the orioles, bobolinks, brown thrashers or wrens to build anywhere near the cabin, hardly allowing bright wings to fly past the cabin window for Cora Suddith to see. "Honery, spunky and mean" are the king-birds. Funny that all other birds don't rise and assert themselves. King-birds with chips always on their shoulders, always clamoring for war. Always hunting trouble. Just like old Adam Bodie!

"Purty," says Ann Suddith.

"Pink," says Esther's Maw.

"Blue's purtier," says Cora Suddith softly. "Huh. Wind air strong. See hit a-blowin' an' a-flappin' tha young-uns dresses. Purty childers. An' sech air a-goin' tuh come along tha top o' Porky! Wal."

Whispers come for a while from either Esther's Maw or Ann Suddith. The girl can't make them out. The whispering dies.

"Reckon 'at ol' apple tree'll hev tuh be cut down, Ann, gal." The shut-in says it.

That's so old Cora can see to the new road, thinks Esther. Settles the hash of the king-birds, too!

More whispering trickles through the floor to the girl's ears. Pretty soon the tread of feet sound above her. Then the sharp clicks of a rifle lever. Esther sees the bare feet of her Maw and Ann Suddith step down off the stoop, move over to a stump. She sees Ann Suddith's hands lay a box and some loose cartridges on the ground and dig a hole with a knife. The girl rests her right cheek on the ground, lies flat. But from under the cabin all she can see are the hands of Ann Suddith and the feet of both women.

Ann Suddith is putting the box and the loose cartridges in the hole now and covering them up. She tamps the earth with her bare foot and covers it with twig ends. The feet move back to the stoop, stand for a minute. Ann Suddith steps into the cabin and Maw Collet walks around the cabin—walking briskly and suddenly disappearing from the girl's view.

Backing out from under the cabin floor, Esther rises, crawls to a screen of scrub and looks around. She has a glimpse of her Maw walking rapidly through the timber, making a short cut to the Daniels cabin. Her Maw will show the pictures to the Daniels. Then she'll go farther down the ridge to the Taneys. Huh! Everything's plain.

Circling through the beeches that grow thick on the slope below the cabin, the girl comes out on the trail leading back to her cabin and beyond. She passes her cabin and soon leaves the trail, turns into a clump of pines that screens a flat rock jutting from the ridge-side. She pushes her rifle over the ledge and climbs up after it. On this platform of rock she pauses and listens. Nothing can be heard above the soughing of the wind. Above the ledge are suckers growing on a stump. She finds a toe-hold on sharp rocks protruding above the ledge and climbs higher, to a fork in a narrow gully, a gully made by countless mountain storms and rains washing the slope. She follows the gully, stepping without noise on its soft bed until she reaches the top of Porky, where the gully spreads into a fan-like depression.

When she steps out she feels the nakedness of the ridge-top. Trees are almost stripped of leaves. The beating mountain wind whistles as it plucks the foliage, shrieks through a lone pine; gusts whip the girl's petticoat and her hair as she moves rapidly along the ridge-top. Leaves flash in the sun like bright wings; some strike her and cling. She picks them off, hands them to the passing wind. Leaves are old things, and old things are passing. She's losing something within her; it's like an endless plucking going on in her breast. She feels lighter.

She reaches a knoll, Porky's wart, and climbs it to a patch of holly bushes. There is a pocket in the bushes, which she enters. She lays down her rifle-gun, looks below, separating the tops of the bushes to peer through. She sees the Pelten cabin, now deserted and overrun with creepers; its tumbling chimney.

It was from this pocket where she's sitting, this lookout used by hillmen to spot revenue men, that the gun-fire of the Bodies and Taneys came which laid the whole Pelten family low. The Bodie clan stayed in these holly bushes for four days and nights running, firing into the roof until it looked like a sieve, putting bullets through the cabin between the logs. It comes back to her vividly, the whole scene. Old Adam Bodie lugging victuals and water to his clansmen. Far back on the ridge, under the lone pine, she sat a good deal of the time during those four days. Adam Bodie passing her at regular intervals, carrying water, victuals and sometimes ammunition. He couldn't shoot any more because of his shaky hands.

"But, by doggies, Adam kin fotch!" he'd say.

She and her Maw were pressed into the feud. That was why she had stayed under the pine-tree. The oracle hadn't commanded, hadn't asked the two women to do a thing but he had thrown out alarms about the Pelten kin "a-comin' " from Misery to clean up the ridge. So she and her Maw had to be ready.

During those four days when Adam Bodie would pass her watch-out place carrying things he'd always hold that stiff finger of his up. She would watch the flagging shadow of his hand on the ground and listen. She had always felt that she had to seem wide awake and ready.

"Ornery skunks! Doggone robbers! Hain't fitten fer Porky."

Sometimes he'd pause to tell her over again about the grandpap of the Peltens killing his hound ten years before. He'd repeat about seeing the collar of his "kilt" dog on a half-grown Pelten mongrel a few days back.

Folks who had been friendly with the Peltens had loaded up their things and moved to Misery, taking the windows of their cabins along. Some took the doors of their cabins. Exodus of weaker clans.

No Pelten kin came from Misery during those four days and the Peltens' bodies were riddled with bullets. When the sheriff and deputies descended on the ridge, captured the Bodie men on the wart and went into the cabin, the besieged were all done in. The sheriff could see daylight through a hundred holes in the roof and between the logs. He said the Peltens had been dead for two days. Some of the bullets entering their bodies hadn't drawn any blood, hadn't even made a red spot.

Tom, Ned and Carr Bodie and Sid and Luke Taney, her own cousins, were sent up for twenty years. Old Adam Bodie hadn't done any of the shooting and the court freed him. For a long time after his nephews went up there was a lull; lull really until now. The oracle kept his stiff finger tucked away in his shaking hand when he visited around, didn't talk much but always seemed to be listening, waiting. Sometimes he set folks' minds running back; started them tracing grievances.

The Pelten-Bodie feud passes through her mind in a flash, in all its details, while she adjusts her body, before she looks down toward the gently sloping tail of Porky where the road running from Anathoth to Leeston crosses the tail. Over the tail she knows that it follows a creek-bed—good road there when it's dry, but when it rains there's no going over it. And beyond where the road leaves the creek-bed and traverses the swamp for a mile, the road is impassable for a third of the time. Wagons sink to their hubs, and mules and horses carrying heavily laden sacks get mired. The swamp niggers have to help lift them out. When there's no sugar or white flour in Leeston, old man Steele, keeper of the general store, tells folks always that a load's mired. When the sugar finally comes, or the flour, prices look like robbery. The fine white-oak cross-ties her Paw cuts have to lie on the ridge for six months, sometimes, before the road from end to end is fit to travel, and then only ten cross-ties at a time can be hauled, against twenty that can be hauled from Misery Mountain district.

DOWN beyond the end of the ridge, at the very tip of Porky's tail, where the tail meets the heavily wooded base of a small hill, she suddenly sees men standing. Three men standing close together, partly hidden by sycamores. After a while two of them leave the woods and advance up the tail of Porky where the road crosses. One of these two men carries a long pole and when he reaches the road he stands the pole on end. He is moving it about now, trying it in different places while the other man sits down and takes it easy. The third stranger who stands just at the edge of the sycamores is looking through a contraption. It looks to Esther like a small-headed spider with great long legs. The man moves the legs of the contraption about and looks through the head of it again. Seems as if he were teaching the contraption to walk, putting its feet out and pressing them down that way. Now he's waving his arms at the man with the pole who moves it about; the man with the pole can't seem to satisfy the other for a while. The man sitting down doesn't seem to be worrying any; he just smokes his pipe and looks skyward, follows the flight of a hawk.

When the man peeping through the contraption is satisfied and makes a signal with his arms, the man sitting on the ground gets up and drives a stake. Must be that the man with the pole told him to do it. The two men on Porky's tail move up the ridge toward her and the one with the contraption moves it out of the sycamores, up to the road, and spreads its legs out once more. He's peeping again now; there are more signals from him; the man with the pole has the same tough time over again trying to suit the other. The man who got up to drive the stake sits down again. He's gazing upward, rolling his head around, trying to locate the hawk. Huh! Can't he help? Do something besides sit? Do these men have to go through all that funny business before the road can be built? Used to be that the county road overseer would just "warn" mountain hands and they'd begin work. Will a chain gang follow them up? Don't they know Porky's top might be hard with frost before long?

Folks want to get over the road. Folks are waiting out yonder. Will the road be white and even like the one in the pictures? White and even. In her mind she sees it that way, sees the chug-wagons going over it like the wind. She sees the young man wearing smiles, and hair that defies the wind. His dotted tie streaming; his striped coat fluttering. Her mind's eye follows him as he speeds down the ridge, descends the other end, winds through the valley between Porky and the little hills and comes out on Main Street in Leeston. She brings him back and starts him over again at the end of Porky's tail. His smiles say to come along, and she climbs in; it's more as if she were lifted in by the smiles; the smiles are unseen gentle hands lifting, lightly. Down the ridge road now. Hill folks gaping. Through the valley. Into Leeston. Leeston folks aflutter as she rides into town. Folks stare too much, and she is whizzing through the hills again, through strange lands. The wind is whipping her hair. But the young man's hair lies smooth. She wants to feel it. Strokes of his hair that seem real flush her cheeks.

The ride seems to end suddenly, mysteriously, nowhere in particular. She thinks of her Maw and Cora Suddith who are waiting, too. Waiting for folks. In her mind the girl whizzes the other chug-wagon down the ridge and the two older women see; Cora, the shut-in from her window and Maw Collet from hers. The woman wearing the pink scarf is dropping smiles, the children, too. Smiles are petals of flowers dropping, dropping on her Maw and the shut-in. Other women are watching the whizzing machines from behind trees, from doorways. Timidly they venture out to follow it with their eyes, pulled out by the smiles.

And over the ridge again the girl takes the young man's car. In her mind she flies home to put on shoes and stockings and her "taffeter" dress. Now she can put her feet out and she can hear the swish and flutter of her dress, the flapping of the dotted tie. Her mind journeys are long. Time flies. The three strange men move farther up the ridge.

In a flash she's jerked back to her seat in the holly bushes on Porky's wart. Not as if a curtain lowers on her dream; not as if her dream-folks slowly melt away. It's like when the teacher at school used to rub out a pretty picture on the blackboard. That is what the shaking shadow of a hand suddenly does to her mind's journey. The aspen thicket growing near the base of the wart makes a restless shadow on the ridge-top, and beyond it the shadow of an old gesture is restless, too. Adam Bodie's hand!

Voices come. She climbs a little higher on the wart and parting the tops of the holly bushes sees the stooping figures of six men. Six hillmen. Old Adam Bodie, his nephew Isaiah Bodie, Cal and Ed Daniels, Moses Wellcome, and Earl Taney. The six are all looking back along the ridge-top now. Seem to be waiting. Waiting for more hillmen. Getting a mob together.

Old man Bodie's hand flies up again.

"Wimmen. Huh. Wimmen air ornery an' low-down."

The girl sees another figure come from behind the base of the wart, stoop and join the others behind the aspen thicket. It's Ames Suddith. Ann Suddith's man. Son-in-law to old Cora, the shut-in. His face glows from internal heat. His voice splutters:

" 'At copperhaid woman o' mine's been a-stealin' my rifle-gun bullets. Fotched her two up-side her head an' she chased me outen tha shack with my ol' muzzle-loader. An' ol' Cora a-tellin' her tuh shoot ef I come back. Ol' blunderbuss gun-barrel air loaded clar up tuh tha muzzle, nuffen iron in hit tuh knock a mule over. Women air a-goin' crazy-simple. Ol' Cora a-pipin' 'bout purties a-comin'; axed me tuh chop-cut tha ol' apple-tree. Huh. Seed ol' lady Collet a-comin' down-trail a-stoppin' suddint-quick ever' two-three steps an' a-glancin' at tha ridge-seat. I'm a-tellin' yuh she seed likker-snakes; she shore seed somethin' 'at warn't thar."

Earl Taney pulls a twig apart viciously.

"An' my ol' woman tole me thar's nary a ca'tridge-bullet left. She's a liar. She air a doggone sow o' a liar. Reckon I don' sure-know I got bullets an' I hain't? Reckon I don' know I got a box o' thirties fer my Winchester?"

The girl bets with herself that Earl Taney didn't biff his women two, or even one. His woman can lick three like him. Henpecked Earl always has to beg for his gun to hunt with.

"Wal, I box-hitted her ears, I'm a-tellin' yuh."

Whopping liar! thinks the girl.

Cal and Ned Daniels say that their Maw spirited away rifles *and* cartridges.

"Jes' stole-took 'em. My own Maw!" adds Cal.

Adam Bodie's hand goes up; his stiff middle finger gets their eyes.

"Wimmen! Ornery, yaller wimmen! I allus said 'at nothin' but a whip-beatin' with a cow's tail'll larn 'em. Hit shore used tuh trick-turn my woman from her sotten ways. 'At's what they's a-needin'. Us'll jes' cut offen a cow's fly-swatter an' beat 'em till they fork over you-un's ca'tridges an' rifle-guns."

The five men look away from Adam Bodie. They dig their toes into the ground or pluck the light yellow aspen leaves. They don't spring at the idea.

All of them must be able to see the three strangers working their way up the ridge toward the wart, toward the aspen thicket. But their minds haven't turned to the strangers yet.

"Hit's cold," says Adam Bodie and buttons his coat. "Reckon I'll likker us ef yuh come along. Two kinds. White-corn an' applejack an' holp yoreself."

The oracle jerks down his hand and leads the way. They all stoop as they back away from the aspen thicket. They disappear from the girl's view for a minute or two then appear coming around the other side of the wart, stooping as they walk in Indian file toward the shot-up Pelten cabin. They straighten up when they put the cabin between themselves and the strangers working on the ridge-seat. The door of the cabin looks down the slope, facing a trail. When they disappear from view again she knows they have entered.

She knows what will go on in that cabin. Adam Bodie will give the six other hillmen the white-corn whisky first, then the applejack. Then the white-corn again. He will mix war in their bellies. The liquor will touch their hate to flame. Out of that hell-mixture of mountain spirits a thousand imp-devils will be born to sport in the blood of these seven hillmen. The imp-devils will float with the hillmen's blood to their heads. God and blood-kin won't mean anything to these hillmen. The one thought, the one lust, will be a cow's tail laid across the backs of their women.

The girl's hands turn cold. Rubbing them doesn't bring warmth. It doesn't help to squeeze them under her armpits.

Ants seem to be crawling on her back. She's seen death many times. She's seen mountain men gouge each other to death. And women flogged with a birch rod. But for men to take from a cow that which—that which—Oh Lord! it will be heavy and wet; it will cling! Lord! Lord, *the cow!*

Ages of guzzling seem to be passing in the cabin. Seems so to the girl. The strangers move little by little up the ridge-top, toward the wart. Shadows lengthen.

From around the corner of the cabin they come. The seven. Adam Bodie is holding up his hand; he is carrying it like a flag.

All walk unsteadily in a tight group up the slope toward the wart. Grimacing, they turn sharply after Cal Daniels who lurches ahead. Must be his cow tethered on the other side of the slope they're after.

But Moses Wellcome halts suddenly and says something to the others who jerk their heads around to the left. All stare at the three strange men. Cows and women are blotted out of their minds. New hates burn hot. Beastlike they go for the nearest prey. Ned Daniels keeps kicking stones as they approach the strangers, as if his muscles can't wait to act. Adam Bodie pulls down his right arm and hand to rub the sleep out and hoists them up again. The hillmen pause about five feet away from the man holding the high pole and the one who is driving stake.

There are seconds when nothing seems to move much. The hillmen sway a little on their feet. Puzzlement comes to the faces of the strangers. The third stranger, a hundred feet down the ridge, folds his arms.

Moses Wellcome reaches down and pulls up a stake. He starts to throw it aside and step toward another. But the stranger who's driven the stakes rushes him. Moses Wellcome, unsteady on his feet, receives a blow in the face that he doesn't seem to feel, then closes with the stranger. Trips him. The girl sees the stranger with the pole drop it, swing it as he advances to the rescue, hears it meet bone and flesh once. She loses sight of him. The third stranger, armed with a stone, is upset just as he reaches the twining mass. The girl can see his body pulled in under the bent-over hillmen. It comes to her in a flash that the strangers are very small in body compared to the hillmen. And this difference seems to grow, in a few seconds. She can only see the hillmen in a thick mass. She can't reason how there is room for three men in the center of that close circle. The hillmen seem so tall! Just seconds when her eyes don't seem to account to her mind. Suddenly, she sees a hillman treading a pair of shoulders.

The girl brings her rifle-gun to her shoulder. The red bead on the front sight is covering a hillman's head—which hillman she can't tell. There would be no choice, anyway. Each head, each body seems a tentacle of a vague single demon; it's like a bad dream. The sudden raising of an arm holding a stake, point downward, seems more actual. So does the slight disintegration of the mass. An opening is made for the descent of the sharpened stake. It is Moses Wellcome's arm drawn back with the stake. Queer how much can be caught by the eyes and sent to the mind in just a second or two. It seems ages before the girl moves the front sight bead on to the hand of Moses Wellcome and fires.

And it seems a long time after she sees the stake spin and light on the ground and Moses Wellcome's hanging hand begin to bleed that the hillmen look around. The stake, knocked twenty feet away by the impact of four hundred and fifty grains of lead, strikes the ground before the hillmen pay any attention to the roar of black powder. Their nerves are deadened and respond lazily.

What forces its way to their minds more quickly is the sudden leap the girl makes through the holly bushes and down the steep side of the wart. They straighten up. They step down. Grow shorter.

Esther, covering them with her rifle-gun, advances to within fifteen steps of the hillmen. The strangers are crawling out from under. Hidden by the six other hillmen Adam Bodie crawls away down the side of the slope.

The girl lowers her rifle a little, holds the butt under her right arm. She swings the muzzle in a short arc, a sort of slow fanning motion that leaves none of the six hillmen uncovered for more than a second.

"Yuh low-down sots! Yuh —— puppies!"

The strangers totter as they rise. They feel different parts of their bodies. They are dazed. Only one of their faces is bloody. The other two must have managed to keep their faces down, protected from boot heels. They stand unsteadily, close to the hillmen. They are trying to gather their senses and are looking at the girl. One of them falls down again, close to the legs of Cal Daniels. But the hillmen don't seem to realize his presence. The hillmen are looking at the girl; they are throwing nasty glances and mumbling. She sees their eyes suddenly move slowly to the wart back of her, narrowed almost to cracks. She sees lips compressed by sudden surges of ferocity. Turning quickly she sees her Maw coming from behind the wart. Maw Collet's holding the booklet.

Esther sees Moses Wellcome's mouth open, sees his head leer.

"Copperhaids!"

Ned Daniels moistens his lips two or three times.

"Snake-wimmen! Collet snakes!"

Ugly, dangerous words to use in the mountains. None worse in all the vocabulary of liquored men.

Internal heat flushes the face of the girl and her Maw. There is a minute while those names sink in. Long enough for some friendly chickadees to fly to the aspen thicket from a maple-tree below the ridge-seat. The chickadees don't light in the aspen thicket; they seem frightened by something there. Dart back to the maple.

"Copperhaids!"

The loud voice of Ames Suddith cries it at Maw Collet. Toward the girl he makes a nameless gesture with his hand.

IT IS this gesture that seems to bring another figure quickly into their midst. Paw Collet, passing across the girl's vision, stops the throw of the rifle to her shoulder. His stride is deceiving. It's not the quickness of his step but the length of his stride that brings him in front of Ames Suddith so soon. And the wood-cutter seems to step up leisurely, just to look on. There's no trace of a temper on his face. His face is white. Chalk white. His lips are quivering.

Ames Suddith is fooled by chalkiness of the woodsman's face. He only knows one kind of paleness, that of fear. And Ames Suddith is helped to the belief that Paw Collet is stark scared by his knowledge of the man. Paw Collet would take anything to preserve peace. Rather die than strike. Even his blood is in hiding now. This is the order of Ames Suddith's thoughts. So, he laughs again.

The other hillmen laugh defiantly, too. Leer. Ned Daniels wets his finger and makes out that it sizzles on Paw Collet's left arm. On the faces of Esther and her Maw creep flushes of shame. Six hillmen and Maw Collet and the girl who have lived a lifetime with the woodsmen are cocksure of a tradition. The hillmen are pushing their faces forward as an invitation to be struck, the girl is raising her rifle to take things into her own hands. One of the strangers holds up a hand to the girl. There is a peculiar dread on his face as his eyes fly back to Paw Collet; the stranger's eyes are expectant and they are alert, as if he's preparing for the fall of a tree. He, alone, is afraid of that chalky face.

Paw Collet's right arm is drawn back, his left hand following; like the rhythmic back swing for an ax stroke. His fist closes.

Still the hillmen laugh. Don't believe the fist will strike. Ames Suddith pushes his face forward once more. Tradition! He makes that gesture again, toward the girl.

The swing of a woodsman's arm is deceiving. A sort of slow arc, not too fast for the eye to follow. Ames Suddith could dodge, it seems, after the woodsman's swing begins. Instead, he laughs.

If Paw Collet's hand were an ax head and Ames Suddith's face were white oak, the edge would take a bit four inches deep. The ax blade would be hard to pull out. The full momentum of a woodsman's swing is reached just before his blade strikes wood; a sort of power invisible.

Maw Collet, the girl, and the hillmen do not expect the blow from Paw Collet to come. Contrary to tradition. They've seen him threaten to strike two or three times in forty years. But a melting expression would always creep across his face and he'd wander off as if even his threat hurt him. Paw Collet would never stay around where hot words were passed. He'd squirm and get away at the first chance.

Now they all see Ames Suddith drop under the feet of the other hillmen before his face begins to bleed. He bleeds unseen. They hear the thud and crunch of the blow, but it doesn't seem actual to anybody but the one stranger. He gives a short nod. The others don't seem to grasp the actuality until another thud comes, until Cal Daniels sinks to the ground. Then realization comes quick to the hillmen. The drink's dying in them, and they begin to read that chalky paleness of Paw Collet's face, understand the purpose in his hard eyes. They're only standing there to be knocked down one at a time, waiting to have their features changed. There will be no odds. The girl, Esther, has the rifle-gun, They see a wolf where they saw a sheep.

The hillmen begin backing away, as if from a specter. They spread out as they retreat, revealing the squashed faces of Ames Suddith and Cal Daniels. The woodcutter starts to follow Moses Wellcome, but he sees the retreating hillman's eyes looking beyond him. The other hillmen shift their eyes, back hesitatingly.

Paw Collet turns in time to see a hand pushed up out of the aspen thicket behind him. A stiff middle finger is pointing toward the old Pelten cabin, a gesture plain in its meaning. More white-corn whisky and applejack in the cabin. More elixir of war! More courage!

The hand is jerked down. The hillmen hesitate. Stop retreating.

Getting down on his belly Paw Collet worms his way toward a pawpaw bush. Under cover of it he makes his way on his fours to a patch of laurel scrub at the beginning of the slope. Three strides take him from the scrub to the aspen thicket. He dives in.

The hillmen and the strangers stand transfixed. The eyes of Maw Collet and the girl are wide with wonder.

Minutes pass. There is no movement the onlookers can see. No sound they can hear.

Now Paw Collet's tall, gaunt form straightens up slowly in the aspen thicket. He dusts his hands lightly.

The aspen thicket is shivering.

Let Edgar Young Conduct you on a Unique South American Journey

An Unbeaten Path

THERE is a path leading from Quito across the eastern Cordilleras into that vast boundary of land known as the Oriente Province. Ecuador appears small on a map where the huge republics of Brazil, Peru and others appear, but it has twelve hundred miles of coastline on the Pacific and thrusts its apex far beyond the Andes into the continent of South America, the exact distance depending on where the boundaries with neighboring republics are finally established.

This eastern portion of Ecuador is less known than any portion of Africa, for there are no roads and this lone footpath is open only in the dry season. During the height of the rainy season in May, June and July the path is absolutely impassable in its present state. It is a terrible trail even in the dry season. Only forty miles of it is barely passable for horses and mules, and this is the first forty miles.

To get started, one telephones to the Indian governor at Papallacta to send the stipulated number of animals. He is a man elected by the Indians and is as barefooted and ragged as they are, but he possesses the silver-headed cane of authority they bestow upon their choice. The animals will arrive in three days, decrepit jades and scrawny mules with clumsy riding- and pack-saddles. The cost is two dollars native money (one dollar our money) for each riding animal and one dollar and twenty cents (sixty cents) for each cargo of three *arrobas* (seventy-five pounds) for the pack animals.

The barefooted Indians, dressed in short white drawers, shirt and woolen poncho, ride clumsily in or walk leading the horses and mules, for they are unused to riding and are footmen par excellence. Any of them can carry a man at a fast trot from daylight until dark, and in the highland passes one meets them tearing along at top pace with the native mail-pouches. They have long hair, cropped to a bang over the eyes, bronze complexions, large noses, low foreheads, big mouths with thin lips, square faces, and a very dull expression of the eyes. Humility is a virtue with them. They are the most humble people in the whole world. They ask you to beat them. They sit at your feet while you eat and will greedily swallow any morsel too tough for chewing after an attempt has been made. The governor has come with them and he is more humble than the rest.

The expedition crawls out of Quito down Saint Augustine Street, along the Carniceria and to the Alameda and out across the plain of Iñaquito. In an hour the village of Guápulo is reached. In this

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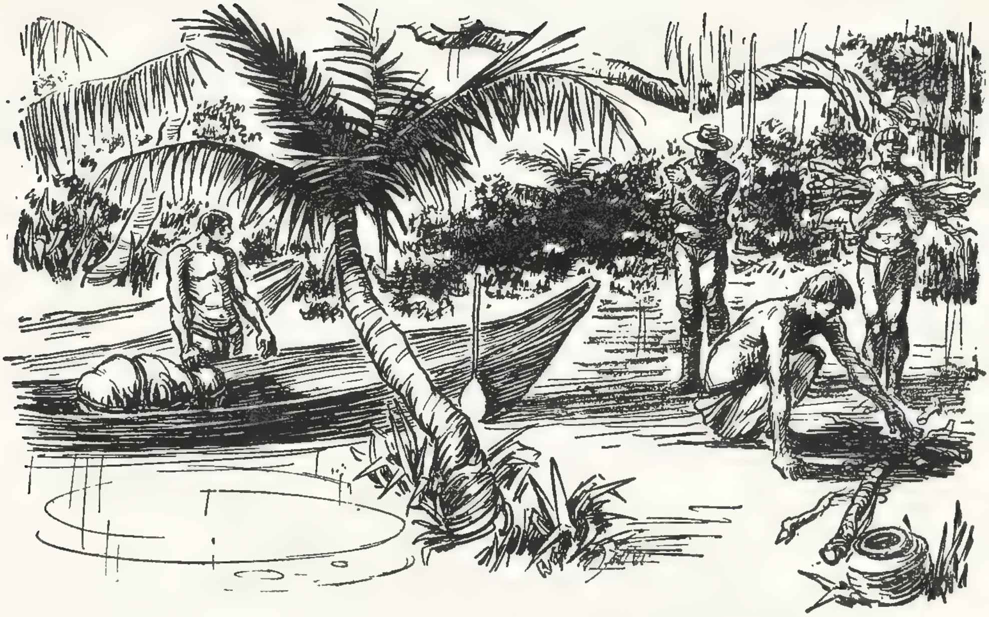

place is the shrine of the Virgin of Guadaloupe to which Quitonians pilgrimage once a year. Thence through the Guaillabamba valley, dotted with green fields of cane and alfalfa, with clumps of cherry trees and myrtle, and here and there a thatched mud hut. At sunset the foot of the range is reached.

The plain upon which one is traveling is a plateau eight thousand feet above the sea, yet the snowclad peaks to the east tower thousands of feet above. The place is a mere cluster of huts called Itulcachi and there is an open shed thatched with grass for the travelers to swing their hammocks in or sprawl upon the ground until morning. With a very early start and by dint of hard effort the *tambo* of Tablon, five miles up the slopes might have been reached the first day. This hamlet is near a large cattle ranch and is the only place on the entire trail where milk can be purchased. From Tablon a wonderful view down into the plateau is afforded. Just below are the twin valleys, Chillo and Puemba separated by Mount Ilaló. Around the edges of these two valleys is an imposing circle of peaks, some of which belch smoke. They are Antisana, Sincholagua, Cotopaxi, Rumiñaqui, Ilinizi, Corazon, Pichincha, Imbabura and Cayambi.

From here the trail takes an immense gorge through metamorphic rocks that are much broken and upheaved and with great gnarled trees growing from the crevices. On a level shelf there is an immense grove with wide-spreading branches 13,000 feet above the sea. This place is reached about noon on the second day. The trail bends sharply upward through a bare stretch dotted with clumps of *paramo* grass to the top of Guamani Ridge, 15,500 feet above sea level. Looking downward toward the east one sees rows and rows of tree-clad mountains with intervening valleys.

A rapid descent is usually made, for the air is ice-laden and a heavy wind sweeps through the pass. At nightfall after having wallowed through quagmire and bog a lone shed is reached where camp is made. It is a terrible half day from here to Papallacta, the animals floundering to their bellies in gullies and mud-holes. This is as far as animals can travel. It is footwork from there on. Forty miles of the trip have been covered.

Papallacta is a cluster of thirty huts built of poles and with thatched roofs. It sits in an amphitheater of black basalt and sandstone on the north slope of Antisana volcano. It is a thousand feet higher than Quito on the other side of the range. The name means "potato" and primitive little yellow Irish potatoes are indigenous in woods of the mountain sides. From these natural "spuds" our own highly cultured ones are derived.

The furnishings of the houses are very primitive. Cooking is done on an open fire and in open earthen kettles in the center of the dirt floor. Corn is ground on a flat stone with a smaller one. Yucca is chewed by the women to make a paste called by them *chicha* (*giamânchi* of the Jiveros) which is stored in crocks. It is fermented to form a beer also called *chicha* and which is drunk excessively on the seven feasts of the year which are a mixture of Catholicism and paganism. Lice abound here as they do all throughout the Andes, both head and body varieties being plentiful. The natives are given to lice eating as they are in the western highlands. White grubs are also considered a luxury. Rotted logs are combed for them. The black head is pinched off and the fat white body eaten with avidity. It must be that grub worms are delicious for they are eaten by primitives all over the world.

THE governor herds in some of the best packers from the surrounding clearings—great barrel-chested men with huge legs and swelling necks. These men are needed for the next stage of the trip, thirteen days to Archidona. They have small pack-saddles strapped to their backs and insist on carrying all members of the party in order to keep from being delayed. A number of Americans and Englishmen have been back-packed over this trail, and women are always carried. A he-man ought to walk but he has undertaken something he will remember as long as he lives. The price for each Indian, payable in advance, is five dollars native (two dollars and fifty cents U. S.) for the thirteen days' trip, said Indian to feed himself and provide shelters for the party.

His load is over a hundred pounds. He carries seventy-five pounds of freight, twenty-five pounds of food (roasted corn and barley meal) and a crockful of *chicha* besides the withes and thongs that make up the pack-saddle and his blow-gun and *chonta* spears. Each man's women and children run beside him with additional food and encouragement for the first two days. The crockful of *chicha* is hidden in a few more days for grub on the return trip. By this time it is teeming with worms but it is all *chicha* to them and improved by the addition.

At Papallacta shoes are discarded and rope sandals made of aloe fiber are donned. Several pairs of these must be brought along for they wear out easily. The only time the trip can be made is between November and May. The trail winds through a tropical jungle of extreme density. There are a hundred rivers to ford, torrents, rivulets. During the rainy season almost two hundred inches of water pours down from the clouds. It rains now and then in the dry season. The Andes hold most of the rainclouds on the eastern side and that is why the Amazon is so large and why there is a rainless belt in Peru; but some of the rainclouds pass over into Ecuador.

The first day from Papallacta, after having climbed up one side of ridges and floundered down the other, traveling under the dripping trees, and thus remaining water-soaked from daylight to dusk, we reach the bank of a small nameless tributary of the Coca. The distance is said to be twelve miles although a man having hiked it will swear to fifty.

The Indians spring into the jungle, and with huge machetes of hardwood, cut poles and branches for the frame of a shelter. There is a ridgepole on two forks against which the men incline sticks. Huge palm leaves are cut. In ten minutes by the watch they have made a wonderful rain-proof tent of leaves that will shelter a dozen men. Green fuel is cut. It is the wonderful *sindicaspi* wood that takes fire like tinder. The traveler cooks and eats his grub. It is a good plan to leave something in the pot for the Indians. Our food is very tantalizing to a man eating parched corn and barley meal continually.

Our supplies are sealed in gasoline cans, but Indians have stolen grub on this stretch and I, for one, don't blame them. Parties of a dozen have been known to make the entire trip without giving the Indians a mouthful. It costs little to make just a bit more mulligan now and then. These Indians are absolutely honest and have never stolen anything but a trifle of food now and then. I would trust one to deliver seventy-five pounds of gold alone at either end of the trail. Curiosity and hunger have caused them to poke a hand into the grub. More power to them! Hope they leave the next cheap skate marooned in the forest.

The trail up to this point is terrible but this is a mere nothing to the next day. It winds up mountains and down ravines and the mire is to a man's knees and the hummocks are slippery as glass. The silent Indians pick out the trail among the trees. They are the least talkative men in the world. A lone hut is reached at nightfall—bamboo and grass. Some of the women and children went back at morning. Most of the others will return from here on the morrow. A few of the stoutest will continue for another day. The Indians have a name for every camping place whether or not there is a hut. This place they call Pacha-mama. We made sixteen miles.

The next day the Indians inform us that we will now see some real bad trail, and at night we have made eight miles through a bewildering stretch of climbing up and sliding down, wading and wallowing, and have reached the forks of the trail at Bajeza, two bamboo huts occupied by Tumaco Indians. One day of rest should be taken on the trip, and this is a good place for it. It is located in a clearing on the top of a ridge running along the Coca River. One fork of the trail goes on easterly to the hamlets of San José, Abila, Loreto and Santa Rosa. The southern fork goes to Archidona and the Napo, and that is where we are going.

The clearing is surrounded by an immense jungle, damp and humid. The trail from here is awful. We have been traveling parallel to most of the streams. From here we must ford them and cross a corduroy of mountains and hills as we head to the south. The jungle is tremendous and the trail grows up with vegetation between trips, so that it must be chopped with wooden machetes by the Indians at the head of the caravan.

We make twelve miles a day after leaving Bajeza. We have waded myriad streams that were fierce torrents, and reached to our waists and armpits. An Indian or two might have been swept downstream without our having been unusually unlucky. *Poco importa! Dios* did it. The widow will have to be taken to a stream and washed by the other women when the packers return with the news. That will end it.

We camp on the bank of the dreaded river Cosanga at a spot called Chiniplaya. It is fearfully rapid and there are immense smooth boulders strewn along the bottom. It is 150 feet wide. In the rainy season it is 300. We arise and struggle through, our feet being swept from under us many times. We make thirteen miles before dark and camp the next night on the bank of the Cochachimbamba after crossing the lofty Guacamayo ridge. The Cochachimbamba is fortunately narrow, and the Indians find a fallen tree trunk that partly allows them to cross and they flounder through the balance up to their necks in the racing water. The Indians call this spot Guayusapugaru.

The trail from here is slightly better, with the exception of fording the furious Hondachi. We were able to make nineteen miles. The Indians tap a milk tree for rich cream and show us the water bamboo (*huadhua*) which yields three quarts of water from between the joints. They gather handfuls of leaves to make *guayusa* tea from a shrub allied to the *coca* from which cocaine and coca-cola is made and of which they also chew the leaves. We camp at a cluster of huts used by Indians who gather copal along the streams and sell it for two cents a pound in Archidona for lighting purposes.

THE next day we drop down the slopes a vertical mile into the village of Archidona, largest hamlet in the Napo country, over a slippery path of grass and clay. Five hundred Indians live here in houses of bamboo which peep from the edges of the forest around the tiny clearings. There is a little chapel with a bell that traveled considerably before it reposed in the tiny belfry. The chief industries of the place are copal gathering, making of fiber cord from century plants, gathering *guayusa* and *coca* leaves. All of which is exported to Quito on human backs.

The Papallacta Indians will go no farther than here. New packers must be hired for the remaining sixteen miles of trail—time, one day; rate, twenty-five cents silver (twelve and a half U. S.) per Indian. They pack to Napo over a good path that crosses two rivers, the Misagualli and Tena, upon the latter of which an American named Felton has a plantation. Mr. Felton was much bedeviled by letters a few years ago when his address was printed in *Adventure,* as he had to send his Indians out with the answers and few people sent postage.

The village of Napo, situated on the bank of the river Napo, 1400 feet above sea-level, is a place of some ninety bamboo and pole houses with grass roofs, and is occupied by white Spanish settlers and their Indians. The Indians work for them under a system of voluntary slavery known locally as *repartos* and each Indian is claimed by an owner. The Indian is allowed to sleep in the yard, upon the porch, or in one of the sheds; and he labors in the forests and plantations for this priviledge and a few yards of *lienzo* each year. This *lienzo* deserves a word. It is a coarse cotton fabric bought in Quito and is the principal trade article on the eastern slopes of the Andes. It passes much more readily than any sort of money and many of the tribes of Indians refuse money and ask for *lienzo* instead. A bale of thirty yards costs two dollars and fifty cents U. S. in Quito.

The Napo is 150 feet wide at Napo village, and from here the canoe trip begins to the Amazon. The local Indians are not real river Indians but are of the packing variety. They do, however, canoe a bit. Canoes are procured and loaded. They will only go to Santa Rosa—one day, sixty miles, rate two and a half yards of *lienzo* per Indian and per canoe. The current averages six miles per hour with several rapids to be shot. At noon Aguana is passed. This is a small settlement of gold-washers who wash the gold from the sands at the mouths of the streams flowing down from the Llanganati Mountains and from the bars along the banks of the Napo. There is an immense deposit of low grade gold ore up in those mountains somewhere.

During the afternoon the old site of Santa Rosa is passed. All the inhabitants died with fevers years ago and the place was abandoned. At nightfall New Santa Rosa is reached. This is a place similar to Napo. Here is where river Indians are hired for the trip to the Amazon—time fifteen days, twenty-five yards of *lienzo* per Indian and ditto per canoe. These are long canoes with a thatched shelter on the rear against the showers and insects.

The Napo from here winds through thousands of islands and it is hard to pick the real channel, but the Indians can do it. The densest of vegetation is on either side, for we are dropping down into the humid Amazon basin. The river receives other streams and gradually widens to five hundred feet, then to a thousand and then to a mile across. Seven hours below Santa Rosa, the gold-washing Indian camp of Suno is passed. In the early afternoon the village of Coca is reached opposite the confluence of the River Coca. Better buy a few fowls, some *manati* lard in bamboo joints, some cane syrup and some rice. This is the last village and the Amazon is thirteen days away!

From here onward it is a trip through the unknown on a flowing yellow river that bends through great walls of jungle inhabited by unfriendly Zaparo Indians, squat fellows with slant eyes and round faces who use bows and arrows besides the customary blow-guns and *chonta* wood spears that are used by the Napos.

The party camps each night on sandbars that run out from the islands or the banks and pitches shelters of palm leaves. Turtle eggs are dug from the sand. There are swarms of mosquitoes and sandflies. Ducks, cranes—eight feet high—and cormorants flop along the river. Parrots and macaws fly over the jungle and squawk from the tree-tops. The jungle contains jaguars, pumas, ant-eaters, tapirs and troops of monkeys. There are fish in the river and the *manati* or river cow that looks like a sea lion and gives milk. The meat is like pork. Swarms of cannibal fish swim around the canoe. On and on.

Finally at last the broad Amazon is sighted. What was it the fellows shouted in the "Anabasis"? I've forgotten my Greek. Anyway they were glad when they saw the sea after a long march. You'll be glad to see the Amazon after the long trip down the Napo, too! No, you're not home yet. It's still a couple of thousand miles to the sea.

From the mouth of the Napo you can either paddle to Pebas, ten hours, or up the Amazon to Iquitos, a half day. At either place steamers may be taken down the big river to Pará and home. There are seventy feet of water at Iquitos, and ships from Europe and New York load cargoes at the dock.

THE BARBARY COAST

by Norman Springer

WITH the possible exception of the Paris Latin Quarter, no district in any town has been more widely—and dubiously—advertised than the Barbary Coast of San Francisco. Mention of the name conjures up before the eyes of millions of story readers and motion picture patrons visions of gaudy and fearful wickedness. And the joke of it is—there is no Barbary Coast. It has been dead these twenty years—stone dead. It was on its very last legs in the opening years of the present century, and the Great Fire of 1906 wiped it clean out of existence.

But in its day the Barbary Coast was a wild place, and it probably deserved all the curses leveled at it. It was a whole quarter, not just a street; it was sailortown; specifically, the deep-water man's sailortown. Far famed Pacific street, with its adjoining courtesans' alleys, was the heart of the district, but the brains were nearer the docks where the sailors' boarding masters had their establishments. These crimps ruled the Barbary Coast, and in all things their words were law. Their rival gangs might shoot and stab each other, but they would unite against the outside world when the word was given. The boarding master's political power could—and more than once did—defy the city.

The Barbary Coast came into being in the 1870's. All through the '80's was its heyday. In the '90's it declined, and its miserable old age ended in the purging flame. Its whole history can be summed up in one word: wheat. Wheat called it into being, lack of wheat killed it.

In those far off golden days when the "realtor" was not in the land, and before Iowa discovered California, the huge valleys of the Golden State each year produced a bumper crop of wheat. Nearly all of it went to Europe.

Every spring literally hundreds of tall sailing ships arrived in San Francisco bay, and they lay there for months waiting for the grain to ripen. They paid off their crews, or their men deserted, and they commonly had but skeleton crews when their turns came beneath the grain spouts.

This was the golden season of the year on the Barbary Coast. For this it lived. "Blood" money sometimes ran as high as one hundred and fifty dollars per man, delivered on board an outbound ship; and this in addition to the advance note for three months' wages which Jack had to pay whether he remembered signing it or not.

When I was a boy in San Francisco the grain fleet had already dwindled to a half hundred ships, and in the Saturday night mob that surged through Pacific street, lumberjacks and soldiers were as plentiful as sailors—which was not at all the case in the old days. The famous crimps were already legendary, though "One-Eyed" Curtain still reigned in Stuart street, and his "rats" were written up in the papers every election time. But "Shanghaii" Brown was gone, the "Knitting Swede" was a mere memory, as were Tom Boyle, and "Deacon" Callender, and others of the old masters.

But many of the old storied buildings were extant, and still operating, though in subdued fashion. I remember the Harpooners' House, on Pacific Street, where the whalemen wassailed. Walrus tusks held up the bar, and curious spoil of far seas decorated the walls, and dark-skinned tattooed men who wore earrings frequented the place. Across the street was the House of All Nations, patronized exclusively by giant blond Scandinavians. Others were the Thalia, Cowboy Mag's, The Clipper Ship, the West Wind, the Trade Wind, the Fair Wind and the What Cheer House.

All gone. Squatting on the long dead corpse is a squalid tourist trap or two which the guide on the sight-seeing bus points out to awed passengers as the wicked Barbary Coast. Soon they will be gone; and the yarns about the old district will grow even taller.

F. R. Buckley

Brings

His Modern Serial in a Medieval Setting

To an unusual conclusion

The *Way of

I, HUMBLE Brother Simeon, herewith write the story of my early wayward days, as a penance for two deeds lately done, very unworthy of my pious office.

Born Francesco Vitali, the son of a Roman musician of poor circumstances, I was early apprenticed to a Rometian mercer and forced into a strange marriage while still in my 'teens; but I quickly tired of both the mercery business and the married state. Thenafter, beguiled by a pink-bearded sergeant of the duke's guard, I decided to become a soldier.

My first assignment in the duke's service was not entirely to my taste, and you shall judge why. There was a certain wealthy count that the duke wished to marry to his sister, the Countess Anita (her former marriage being since annulled). Now this nobleman was enamored of a famous courtezan. It fell to me to convince her that it were best for her to depart from the realms of Rometia. I forced my way into her castle through a balcony, and after some warm sword play with her guards, during which I killed two of them and received a slight cut myself, I brought the woman to terms, and she sent the writhing, rat-faced little worm of a count about his business. I gave her a parchment with an order for twenty thousand ducats from the duke. Thereupon the wanton made sheep's-eyes at me, but I would have none of her.

"Go home then to thy milk and water," she jeered.

So I rode home. I went to Sergeant Lucio's quarters in the citadel, and being worn out, and stiffened of my wound, I slept long and deep. I awoke when a great voice rumbled in my ear.

"What?" I asked sleepily.

"Arise, Francesco," roared the pink-bearded Lucio, "and on the instant! The duke demands to see thee."

THE duke was in his cabinet when we arrived. What was my astonishment when the captain, my superior, looked at me as if he did not know me, and addressed the sergeant thuswise!

"Retain thy prisoner till I return, Sergeant."

"Prisoner!" I gasped.

"'Tis but the duke's mode of keeping his skirts clean, fool!" cautioned Lucio in a whisper. "Since thou'st done well, there's nothing to fear."

When the duke heard my story, he was immensely pleased and presented me with a medal of his new Order of Jesus Christ. Then I heard the duke order that payment be stopped on the warrant that I had given to the woman. He intimated that he would stop her mouth for her . . . My disgust knew no bounds. Here I had betrayed a weak woman to the knife, forsooth, of one of the duke's assassins—and had been rewarded for my valor—with a cross of Jesus Christ! Alas!

Soon afterward the duke had another delicate mission for me to perform. A certain Pietro Uccelo, a leader of marauding free-lance troops, had of late made much trouble for the duke; wherefore he had his physician concoct a mortal poison which I was to convey to Uccello's camp and put some in his food. For that deed I should receive absolution from the Church and a sublieutenancy from the duke. A betrayer of women and a poisoner, I! I played sick for several days, till the duke, becoming impatient, ordered me arrested. Then I fled for my

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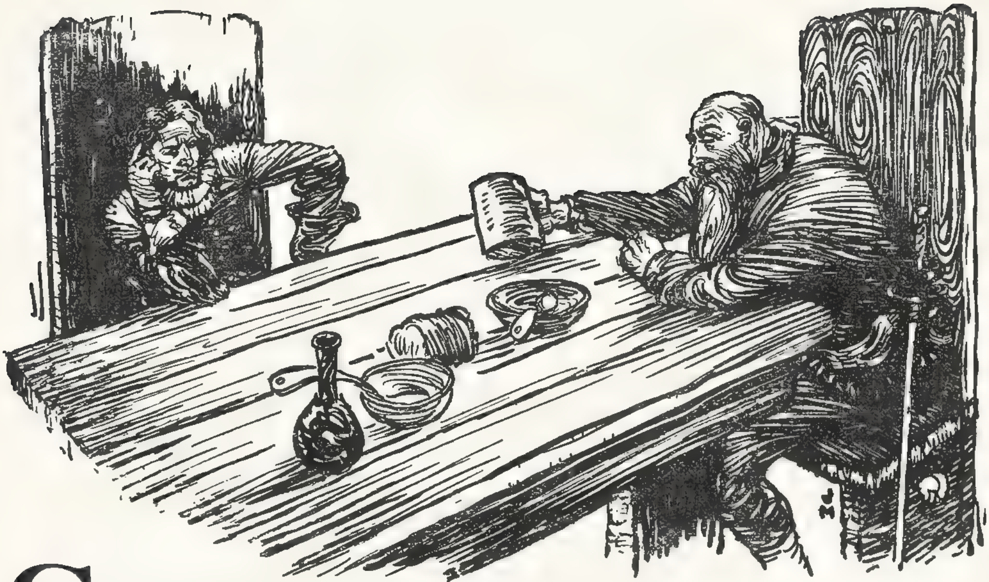
**This is an Off-The-Trail story. See contents page*



Sinners

life—and direct to the camp of Uccello. I had some little trouble in conivncing him that I was there for my own safety and not for his destruction—for Uccello knew of the duke's plot. And so I joined the ranks of the marauders, learned much, and in time rose to a lieutenancy; and when Captain Uccello was killed in combat, I naturally assumed his place.

About the time of my becoming head of the troop, we were hired to take by storming a certain castle belonging to the Count Roberto, husband of the Countess Anita, sister of the Duke of Rometia. The count (the castle was his property) had in some manner offended his lady and had been forcefully ejected from the place. The poor count had had the temerity to collect forces to besiege the castle. The duke, hearing of this show of boldness on the part of the weak-kneed Roberto, and his own troops being occupied in other directions, found himself under the necessity of accepting the services of *condottiere*. And thus, I, Francesco Vitali, who had fled the duke for my life, was now in position to deal with the duke with proper dignity—and to command a fat figure for my services.

I laid my plans for the campaign, using strategy such as was new in the annals of warfare of the time. Then, using my flanks as decoys, I smashed through Roberto's forces at the center with my speediest column infantry. The battle was a rout, and my whole force was soon within the castle gate. I had not seen the count himself in the combat, so I guessed he had sped to gather more forces.

The need of the hour was that of provender for man and beast, so that it was urgent that I dispatch a man to the duke asking for food supplies and men. One of the countess' guard was lowered from a turret window over the side off a precipice; he took to horse and was off. Meanwhile the Count Roberto had returned with reenforcements and had begun to storm the castle. After a little he ordered cease firing, and called for a parley. But the Countess Anita, either through spite or as a piece of foolery, snatched a match from the hand of a cannoneer and fired one of the wall guns full at her husband. Lucky for him, the count had moved a little to one side some time before. But all conciliatory discussion was thenceforth cut off. For this caprice I ordered the countess arrested and confined to her room.

IN DUE time the messenger returned with the disconcerting answer that since a certain Matteo Scarlatti had withdrawn his *condottieri* from the duke's forces, no aid would be forthcoming. And while our supplies got lower and lower, and the outlook for maintaining our position grew very ill indeed, I suddenly found myself head over heels in love with the Countess Anita—and that wonderful woman admitted quite tenderly to me that she cared more than a little for me.

Unfortunately, one of the stewards fled the castle to spill scurrilous tales into the ears of the duke, hoping to line his pockets for this dastardly service. And true to his stamp, the duke, who heretofore had pleaded inability to aid me in any way, sped to the castle, horse, foot and artillery. Riding up to the very walls with an escort of fifty horse, he called me a lecherous dog. That roused my ire and I defied him laughingly.

"Then mark me," cried the duke. "Your food is almost gone, and if I must stay here and starve you forth, I'll hang every one of your bawds of soldiers. I swear it!"

There was nothing to do, if I cared to hold the stronghold much longer, but to try to procure aid from this old Scarlatti. But the messenger I sent him came back with the word, that since my former captain, Pietro Uccello, had once refused Scarlatti succor, the old man would have nothing to do with my affairs unless I should come to him in person to beg aid. What could a man do? I swallowed my pride, gave orders to my lieutenant for the continuance of the defense, bade unhappy farewell to Anita, and using the rope passage over the precipice, I was off to beard the old lion, Scarlatti.

What measures did I use to enlist the old warrior's aid? Bluster, my friends! Certainly no humility. The wine-guzzling fellow liked my youthful show of bravado—and what is more, he read, between the lines of my brief narration of my plight, the real significance that the woman in the affair had on my viewpoint. And so I won him over.

Alas! Approaching the castle after two days' forced march, we found that some scoundrelly soldier had betrayed his trust and had opened the gates for the combined forces of the duke and Roberto. Most of my men had joined the duke's ranks on pain of being swung from a rope's end. About two hundred of my men, however, had escaped, and with this pitiful force in hand, I set about thinking up my next move. It was reported to me that the duke had hidden the countess in some nunnery. One of my scouts found the place, some ten miles from the castle. It was guarded by a troop of the duke's horse.

Now old Scarlatti had some time in the past made some nonsensical vow about never attacking church property, nor could I make him see how foolish was his stand when he refused to advance with me to take the nunnery. He did at length yield sufficiently to be willing to accompany me with his men, merely to give the impression to the enemy that my fighting force was far more potent and sizable than it actually would be.

"Your horse can remain a half-mile away, if they desire," I said with some anger.

Said Scarlatti's lieutenant, a superstitious lout—

"A mile would perhaps be more—"

"Who asked thy opinion?" roared old Matteo. "Thou wilt halt where I command—and fight too, if I wish it. By God's body, get thee hence! Hence, I say!"

I helped old Matteo with his buckler. He held out his hand.

"I do wish you success from the bottom of my heart, Francesco," he said.

We reached the neighborhood of the nunnery just as the voice of the convent bell announced the hour of the angelus.

THERE was no angelus for us, however; nor for the guard about the nunnery; picquets had warned it of our coming, and in the failing light, it awaited us in battle array, if such a term may be applied to the ranging of a hundred horse. A glance divulged the strategy of the commander; he had half his force drawn up before the main gate of the building, and the other half split into two quarters, which he held ready to loose into the flanks of our advance. Mine own strategy, it will be remembered, at the entrance into Count Roberto's castle.

It is possible that, while present at the siege, he had heard of this device of mine, and taken it for a model, failing entirely to consider that the force at my disposal had consisted of infantry and artillery, as well as horse. Such is the military mind; it is capable of learning what hath been done before, and of ordering that it be done again, but that is its scope, and no more. The science of war is the invention of clerks, hosiers, painters, goldsmiths, priests and the like, who at one time and another through the ages, have been forced to arms for the defense of their lives or property.

Well—there were we, on a small elevation, with a wood behind us; there were they; beyond them was the nunnery, and the sun was setting. For the last mile or so of the march, my infantry had taken the lead, so that, on the ground, they were in position without further maneuver; I rode once round about them, to assure myself of their temper, which was good; and then, having given the command of preparation for the charge, trotted over to where Scarlatti sat his horse, wrapped to the eyes in a wine-colored cloak, and with a sergeant at either side of him. He was coughing in the chill air of the dusk; and, for some time after he had withdrawn his aged hand from the cloak and extended it to me, he could not speak.

Finally, he spat on the earth, sniffed with his nose and surveyed the situation.

"There will be heavy losses, Captain," he remarked, clearing his throat. "Very heavy, I should say."

"It was to be expected, was it not?" said I.

"Ah, yes—as to that, yes," says the old man, and looked at me with the same expression of doubt he had before employed. "What is to be considered is merely—"

What he meant was, the proportion of the cost to the object attainable by this business; but he would not mention this before his sergeants. Even had he put the question into words, it would have seemed to me, at that moment, too absurd to deserve answer; I was not in the state of fierce exultation which I had experienced as I rode to Costecaldo—the reverse at Castle Impregnable had damped the joy of that state of mind; there remained however, the cold conviction of divine favor I had had then, and the check experienced in the present had turned mine eyes with still more fixity upon the future. That there would be great losses in my force, and that within fifteen minutes, I knew right well—and disregarded; my attention was fixed on the minute at the end of the slaughter, when I should hold Anita in my arms again, and again proceed with the course of life which accident had interrupted.

"Well, God be with thee," says Matteo, withdrawing his hand to the shelter of his cloak again; he detached his eyes from mine, moreover, and stared ostentatiously at the nunnery, to give me warning that he had gone as far, now, as his vow would permit; and that he would not be implicated with me even to the extent of further speech.

I smiled at him; wheeled my horse, galloped back to my own men, and, without further parley, gave the word to advance. They advanced at the ordinary marching pace, in solid column, and in silence, toward the main gate where the cavalry waited.

We were half-way across the plain between the hill and the religious house, when the flanking parties of cavalry charged, to learn by experience what their commander had not had the brains to foresee—namely, that a quarter-squadron, loosed against a superior body of foot in close order, can have but one effect; that of shock; and that there can be only one shock to one charge. Mine own horse, in the instance which this numbskull had thought exemplary, had but been employed as a distraction, and that with cannon-fire to aid it; the cavalry which now thundered down upon us was designed actually to deal with us; as it might, perhaps, have dealt with a rabble of peasants rioting in Rometia.

Of course, it reached our column; struck it with a resounding crash; ploughed into the inner ranks and—disappeared. On the right flank and on the left, it was overwhelmed; the horses stumbled upon the first men struck; the shock was over; and, dismounted, surrounded, outnumbered, the cavalrymen vanished into the swarm of infantry. When my column moved forward again, a dozen riderless horses whose throats had not been cut were galloping wildly from the point at which the charge had struck; while their riders, some facing east, and the remainder facing west, lay in two small hills of dead.

I suppose the commander of the main body perceived his error, and became frenzied; though he now did the best thing possible, I can not credit (after his initial exhibition) that he did it by force of reason; in any event, instead of awaiting us as he had planned to do, he suddenly gave the word, and loosed the more serious bolt of his remaining sixty men, full tilt at the head of our column—which was in the evolution of splitting into three, two designed to flank the stationary body before the main gate, while the other bored into its center.

In vain, while the charge advanced upon us, did I try to countermand this order, and to get the column back into the formation best designed to withstand shock; the flying half-squadron was upon us before I could ride back to the point necessary; and while yet my men of the flanking parties divided their attention between my yells and the thunder of the advancing hoofs, the crash came. Unsupported from the rear, the front half-dozen of ranks was hurled back on the next half-dozen, over which the cavalry rode yelling to fling itself on the rear-guard. There was a wild-haired great fellow with a beard in the front line of the charge; I perceived him against the red flare of the western sky, his sword upraised, and blindly I spurred my horse at him from the side. He slashed backward at me, and his blade rang on my helmet—a terrific blow that cut through the very steel; and then I ran him through the neck, just under the ear, so that he gave a scream and a convulsive jerk of his enormous limbs that brought him out of his saddle, and his horse to its knees.

It was as he slid off my blade into the welter of crushed infantrymen, that I knew him for my old sergeant, Lucio di Caporetto, who had saved my life from the duke; but the recognition, at that moment, stirred not even the softest chord of pity in my soul; still were the eyes of my mind on the future; while my bodily eyes were engaged with the sword of the captain of that guard. His helmet had burst from its strap, and he was bareheaded; I clove his skull down the middle; chopped the hand off his trumpeter, who rode by him, and then spurred my horse to charge into their two beasts so that the three animals, and myself and the two corpses and the howling trumpeter to boot, stood as a breastwork behind which my staggering infantry might snatch a moment to reform.

This moment they seized and, maddened with desperation, began to fight as I had not known men could. I have not been without experience of bloody affairs; I have been in a corridor, packed with men, into which was fired a culverin loaded to the muzzle—with scrap-iron; but never have I seen, or heard of, a spot wherein the carnage was equal to this before the nunnery. Matteo Scarlatti says the same, and he saw all clearly, having advanced with his two sergeants to a place close at hand. For the enemy cavalry was all dismounted, and by this time, my men outnumbered them by very little; and both parties were furious, having orders to boot which did admit of no compromise. Men without weapons fought with their bare hands; such as were stricken from their feet found daggers on the blood-slippery grass, and cut at the hamstrings of the fighters who trampled over them; I myself was twice beaten to my knees, and twice rose again; the struggle lasted until the night was really come; and at last, it was with no more than thirty unwounded men in my train, that I broke from the fray, and rushed at the gate of the nunnery, roaring for admission.

I suppose that the talk of Scarlatti's men had affected even this handful; for when, after parley, the gate swung back to admit such rash beings as would risk excommunication, they did not follow me, and I stormed in alone while they huddled, protesting and arguing together, in the darkness outside the archway.

"Where is the Countess Anita?" I demanded of a reverend woman in a corridor; she fumbled in her girdle for a cross, but abandoned the search in terror at a clearer sight of me. Indeed, I was blood from head to foot, the sword in my hand was red and dripping, and most like the expression of my face was not such as to reassure one accustomed to the contemplation of divine mysteries; I shoved the poor old woman against the wall, and rushed past her yelling Anita's name.

Meseemed that from farther down the passage came to my ears the sound of a reply, and of a hammering upon a door. The candles which, from sockets, had illumined the corridor to where I stood were no more in the pitch blackness ahead; and the unthinking haste with which I charged forward into the darkness almost cost me my life. It had been contrary to the rule of the convent to admit the duke's guard within the walls, but the place possessed an old man, yet hale and strong, whose office was to chop wood and the like; which fellow, stationed as guard before Anita's door, greeted me with a great swing of an ax. I heard the whistle of the blade past my ear without seeing who or what confronted me; I lunged blindly, and felt my point encounter something soft that groaned, while the ax, followed by its wielder, fell heavily across my feet.

"Francesco! Francesco! Francesco!"

This was her voice, from behind a door whose iron studding rasped my knuckles as I stretched forth my hand.

"I am here. Stand away!" I called; shuffled the dying man away from my ankles, and picked up the ax. The first blow made thunderous echoes run up and down the corridor; I heard women shrieking at the far end of it; but as for the door, it budged not. I struck again, and again, the blood drumming in my ears; after a little meseemed that a vibrant sound succeeded the solid boom of the heavy slab; again, and a thin slit of light escaped through a crack.

"Stand away!" I yelled; dealt one more blow with all my force at the place where the lock must be; then, putting my feet in the angle which the far wall of the corridor made with the floor, applied my shoulder to the door. It yielded, it creaked, it cracked; and then gave entirely, falling inward with a crash and a cloud of dust. There was a table in the cell which mine eyes did now encounter, and on it two rushlights, whose flames by some miracle survived the gust of the door's falling; and beyond this table stood the woman I sought.

"Anita!" I cried; and with a sob she came to my arms.

In that moment, my youth came, as it were, to its culmination. In that moment, despite the wreck of my fortunes summed up in the ragged remnant of my band outside, despite the imminent perdition of my soul and, as far as mortal eye could see, the precariousness of my future on this earth, no man in Italy, or in the world either, was so content, so victorious in his soul, as I was. Anita was my fortune, my salvation, and my future; so long as I held her in my arms, as now, the rest was naught.

I suppose I babbled something of this; for of a sudden, raising her head, she gave me good news.

"Ah, but, Francesco," she said, "it is not so. The evils thou hast braved for me are not to come upon us. My brother—"

Instantly, I felt a cold band shrink about my heart; I knew not why; but she saw the change in my expression, and tightened the grip of her hands on my shoulders, while her eyes gazed more earnestly into mine.

"Francesco," she said, "while yet we were jailed in that castle, with no chance of emerging therefrom alive, we did lay our plans accordingly. As yet, thou dost not realize that that time is past; that now we are in the world, and free, and that we must make a new scheme. Listen, listen; my brother is a hard man, but thou hast proved thyself, by this coming to me here, a harder; he did foresee that thou might, and he is not blind to his own interest."

"What is his interest to me?" I demanded, loosing her grip and staring at her. Of a sudden, she seemed to have changed from the woman I had known; I could not understand the import of these words on her lips; though, deep beyond my knowledge, my inner self stood alarmed and trembling.

"Naught, but that it is the same as ours," she rejoined eagerly. "Francesco, thou knowest he was set to hang thee; his pretext was to have been my honor, but really it was because he feared thee. When he learned of thy departure to make junction with Matteo Scarlatti, he was in terror—I saw him, I! Francesco, 'twas then I began to negotiate for thee; but he would still have it, that Scarlatti might refuse alliance. 'Twas to test this that he laid the guard about this place; departing for this war of his, he told me that if thou passed that—"

"I have passed it. What then?"

"We shall not be outcasts, as we foresaw! He doth desire alliance with thee and with Scarlatti; moreover, he would fain bury this affair—of ours—at the castle. Francesco, he will make thee a count under himself, and Castle Impregnable shall be ours."

"Ours?"

"Aye! We can be wed, with his consent!"

My breath in my throat seemed to turn to dust, and I choked upon it; for if before Anita had seemed a stranger, now, looking at me with bright, watchful eyes, like those of a merchant who names a dishonest price and watches the face of his customer, she did assume the guise of an enemy.

"Thou hast forgotten," says I, well knowing that she had not, "that I am wed already."

She laughed.

"But to what? To a wench of the town—by my brother's wish. That need not stand in the way, as thou knowest. What his will did, his will can undo."

Now there fell a silence, unbroken even by our breathing as we faced one the other in that narrow room. This silence she broke, pleading, urging.

"Francesco," she said, "thou hast not known the pleasure of power; while we were in that castle, I did think it was gone from me forever; and according to the habitude of man, we decried it, and said it was evil, and invented schemes, which, because we could compass them, we did call good. Now that that time is past, stay not in delusion longer, I do implore thee. Refuse not the good things of life now, because once they were denied thee."

She laid her hands on my shoulders again, and again I loosed them. Within my breast, something began to seethe and to boil.

" 'Tis not for that reason I do refuse this alliance," I told her, my voice hardly sounding for the constriction in my gorge.

"Why then?" she demanded; and her tones were hard—like a merchant's.

" 'Tis strange that thou hast forgotten so soon," says I; and again we stood in silence, what time she searched my face with her eyes. And now I saw that the calculation in her gaze was not that of the merchant of silks, laces or swords, who demandeth more than is rightly his, and stands prepared to humble himself if it be refused; nay, her look was that of the merchant of flesh and blood, of the noble, who demandeth more than is any man's, and hath pride whereon to fall back, instead of humility.

"I have not forgotten," says she, "thou didst consider my brother an archdevil, as thou hadst the right. Now he is changed to thee."

"Does that change him?" I demanded. "And why hath he changed? Is it for my advantage, or for his own?"

"He doth offer thee a castle, power, honor—"

"Honor?" I cried. "Power to help him blacken the earth with iniquity, whenas the said earth is rising to his overthrow; and at what price? The bastardizing of my son—"

She laughed at that; her lip curled; I did perceive that now, to her, all commoners were bastards. The strange seething in my heart died suddenly to nothing.

"It doth amuse thee," I said through my teeth; as I might have addressed a sentry.

"It doth seem woundily strange that 'tis of thy son thou thinkest now," says she, "when I am in the bargain."

"Thou—in the bargain?"

"Thou hast heard," says she.

There was a sword near my hand, a sharp sword, already red; and as I look back upon myself in that moment, I thank God for a miracle, that I did not kill her. I think 'twas my incredulity saved me from murder; I could not know in my soul that this woman, chaffering for a castle, a title, and a left-handed blessing from a priest, was the same I had known; the fiery angel of Castle Impregnable, who had mocked at the earthen world. It could not be! The glamour of battle was still upon me; I was beside myself; I dreamed.

"Anita!" cried I to her hoarsely. "What bewitchment hath befallen thee? In the name of God!"

"There is no bewitchment," says she, " 'Tis rather thyself that dost require exorcism. Canst thou not see that death and life are two things opposed? How, then, shall the ways of one do for the other? In the castle, I was mad; now I am in my right mind, while thou still ravest. Benefits are offered thee with both hands—the very benefits of power and happiness we were to hew forth, alone, by efforts and means impossible to man. And thou dost refuse them, because forsooth—"

"Because I will not make my wife a mistress, and my son—"

"Yet in thy pride, thou'd crawl before Matteo Scarlatti, seeking aid!"

" 'Twas to myself I did injury then," I told her; "and moreover, there lay before me a great future, full of noble things, for which that injury was a small price."

"And what is this future I offer thee?" she cried.

"Damnation!" I roared, hurling my sword to the table. "Damnation, as thou knowest!"

For one instant, there leaped in her eyes, that flame which had filled them on the battlements; but no sooner was it come, than it died, and once again, her gaze was cold.

"Is it so?" says I, wonderingly. "Is it so?"

She made no answer.

There came into my mind the vision of Stella, at times when she had stared at me thus; sullen, immovable, demanding a new cloak, a larger house, something that she considered her right, and would have at whatever cost. Between her and this woman before me, there stood no difference, save that of the magnitude of their demands, aye, and the cold-bloodedness of their bargaining. For Stella, soft with the humanity of the oppressed, had known no other threat than tears, and had dried those perforce when there was a meal to be cooked; whereas this woman held my life and more in her hands, and stood ready to dash it to the floor, if she gained not her desires.

'Tis well to say—and I have thought it since—that, by the consummation of this change in her, she became another person than the one I had adored, and that accordingly, power resided not in her; it is true, doubtless; but the thought benefited me not then. For the Anita that had vanished—that had never existed—I had altered my very soul, and it changed not with the change in her. For something that was no more than the shadow of death on a common face, I had brought real death to Lucio di Caporetto and a many of my men; and the passing of the shadow from Anita brought them not back to life.

"I'll not marry thee," I said slowly.

At that, her teeth sank into her lip.

"So—is all over between us?"

Of a sudden, I flared into passion.

"For the sake of Christ, woman, has all this been a farce? Dost thou not love me? Hast thou indeed never loved me?"

"Is it thine to ask me that?" she cried in return. "Is that love, to take me as a mistress, and refuse me as a wife?"

I remembered her words upon the walls; her scorn of that sacred institution which now she recommended above all my deeds; above my truck with Scarlatti, above the fight before the nunnery, above the loss of my troop; above the killing of that poor hind outside her door, as a proof of love;

and I began to laugh. Whereas she had stood bravely before me up to then, she now shrank; and as my laughter shook me more, she shrank farther, and after a little, began to weep. I think the laugh can not have been pleasant to hear; for as it continued, and continued, until my very sides ached, and great hot tears began to course down my cheeks, the noble countess, the sister of my lord the Duke of Rometia, she who had talked so gallantly of defiance of this world and its outworn dishonesties, and so bravely contemplated marching by my side to reform it altogether—she groveled on the floor and screamed.

"Francesco! Francesco!"

Strange, but I could not cease my mirth; it was between the racking gusts of it, that I head her piteous wail of my name; and in a voice shaken by chuckles that I said:

"There is a horse for thee, at the great gate. Come!"

She rose to her knees, and stared at me wildly; but she did not rise; she made no move to follow me as, still roaring, I turned to the cell door.

Thence, I looked at her, and our eyes met; I passed into the dark passage, stumbling over the dead wood-chopper, and lurching into the opposite wall.

Hope dies hard; I walked slowly, laughing still, down the corridor to the entrance hall of the nunnery, where a dozen pale sisters shrank from me; out to the gate, by whose posts my lagging escort waited, together with some fifty or sixty wounded that had risen from among the dead; past them (they crossed themselves) to old Matteo Scarlatti, where he sat his horse.

"What's this, in the devil's name?" he snapped, staring at me in perturbed fashion. "Come, Francesco, get the woman, and let us begone from here. Ye can ride with us to some place of safety; my lieutenant thinks one of that guard escaped, and has ridden to inform the duke."

"Ho, ho, ho!" I laughed.

"Come!" cried old Scarlatti. "Art thou wounded?"

He bent from his saddle, seized my hair, and bent my head backward until he could see my face in the light of a torch that blazed behind him.

I saw his eyes change their expression to one I had seen in them before.

"Was she not there?" he asked gently.

"Ho, ho, ho!" says I. "Ho, ho, ho!"

INTRIGUE

CHAPTER XVII

I LISTEN TO MATTEO

SO—I say *so* with reason, as shall be explained later—there was an end of Francesco di Vitali, the captain of free lances; of whom, since he was little known in his own time, and shall be still less when this is read, I have detailed the actions heretofore. Henceforth, his history is not his own, but that of Il Giovane, even as that of Matteo Scarlatti, from that night on, is that of Il Vecchio; aye, the Young Man and the Old Man of all Italy were we, and I do not think Italy shall have forgotten us in two hundred years. To be sure, minstrels die, books are burned and the type with which they were printed rearranged to celebrate new heroes; battle-fields are tilled, castles once destroyed are built again; and castles built are leveled with the earth; but our memorials are other than these.

No greedy Duke of Rometia henceforth can make the peasants swink for taxes dictated by his will alone; it was our swords cleared the path for the Council of Sixty. No longer do the poor of Piazzo pay tithes to two bishoprics—'twas the merchants paid, I wit well; but it was the poor who paid the merchants; we remedied that. Perugia, Ferrara, Florence, Verona, Aquila and Milan—we wrote laws for all of them; at least, we carved in their statute-books grooves with the sword, which their lawmakers filled with ink then or later. For five years, in a country filled with republics and nobles, all of power so nearly equal that none dare fight another without some alliance, we were the alliance sought by all; we held, as princes of *condottiere*, the vote as to whose will should prevail in any dispute. And, the pay being equal, we did always fight on that side which favored the common people; not because we loved the common people, but because we hated the nobles. It was the pleasure of our lives to supply them with the means to undo themselves, and the trade throve accordingly; aye, we proved to the hilt the saying that what a man will do to benefit a friend, is not the half of what he will accomplish when the object is the injury of an enemy.

Matteo had a castle in Umbria, whence he dominated as much land as might have made two counties; and dominated it from afar, marching up and down Italy, as no count, or two counts either, could have done. I had palaces in three cities, and was accustomed, having entered with more pomp than their rulers dare demand, to reside therein with an escort strong enough to eat the city guards.

Aye, as I think of it, meseems that 'tis by these insolences, rather than by the benefits that came with them, that we shall be remembered; if (and as I write on, it seems to me less likely) we are remembered at all. A man hath Matteo's castle now, who betrayed one duchy to another, and then the other to the first, and then both to a third power, for the money wherewith to establish himself; and I wager his folk call him "my Lord" with no less respect than they showed to bold Captain Matteo while he lived.

As for memory of myself—

Vanitas vanitatum, omnia vanitas!

I did not start to gloat over our past eminence; nay, my intent was to explain how we rose from the obscurity of that night at the nunnery, to such a height; what quality or condition of soul it was that, shared between old Matteo and my young self, gave us strength for such mighty emprise.

It was despair.

WITH Matteo, the emotion was, so to say, encysted; when it had been acute, he had lacked the means of expression, and so it had become a settled state of mind, above which he ate, drank, loved, laughed, and was not merry. With me, for two years after my parting from Anita, the state was too keen to be exposed to any one; even to him, whom in the meantime I had come to love.

Well do I remember the day of our mutual confession. He had been urging me to become his lieutenant; and for a week (though I fulfilled the duties of that office) I had refused to accept the commission. We were returning from an affair in Tuscany; the weather was broiling hot; and, during a halt in a village, Scarlatti and I were eating in an inn-garden, under a trellis that bulged with the weight of grapes; I see him now, sitting the other side of a scrubbed table, on whose surface the leaf-shadows flickered; scowling at me for my obstinacy, while he rubbed his gnarled hands together at the smell of the coming meal. His hair was plastered to his head with sweat, his beard dripped; his shirt was open to the belly, and he was caked with dust which to wash off before the end of a march he did account effeminate.

"Thou knowest well, that if the positions were reversed, I would serve thee thus," he grumbled.

"If thou stood in my shoes, thou'd act as I do," says myself; whereat he combed his beard with his fingers, wiped them on his doublet, and opened his mouth.

"If thou'lt tell me what like are thy shoon," says he, changing mind from his first intention, and speaking gently, "I might the better understand thy behavior in them."

A wench brought the wine; and while yet speaking, he put his arm about her waist, kissed her elbow, and grinned at her protests. I regarded the affair with a sour eye; the which he noted.

"'Tis necessary to stand in shoon ere their peculiarities become manifest," I said coldly.

"And how dost thou know," he retorted, pouring out a jorum for himself, "that I've not stood in thine, aye, and marched and fought in 'em, too, while yet thou smelt of mother's milk? Go to, young man; I am over sixty."

He poured out another mug of wine, drank it at a gulp as he had drunk the first; and so disposed of four others. Then he yelled for the wench to come again, with two bottles.

"And when she comes," says he to me in the bullying tone that served him for endearments, "I'll have thee feel her ribs. I'm sick of these vapors of thine, Francesco *mio*."

I had no need to answer him direct; for it was the landlord brought the wine; but Matteo needed no words, after the sneer of disgust I gave him. He said no more, either, until he had finished another bottle;

when he proclaimed his thirst quenched, and announced that he would fain drink. *In hoc signo*, and in silence, vanished three-quarters of the third bottle; and then, of a sudden, the old man leaned across the table and addressed me.

"Hearken, my son," says he, "to the words of a loving father, and turn not up thy nose at the smell of God's fermented creation upon his breath. The intellect of man is a perverse thing; man is a perverse animal; alone of the beasts he doth take that which was given him as a means to an end, and make an end of it. Hic. I crave pardon."

"As for instance," says I, "that we were given wine as an aid to digestion; and yet some of us do regard it as the main part of a meal."

His stomach was empty, for it was his habit to have no more than a crust for breakfast, now that his years were coming upon him; so he crooked his forefinger at me in roguish manner, and chuckled, and shook his head, and spilled half of his next mug of wine over the table; yet were his old eyes steady and keen.

"The point is well taken in the instance of wine," says he, "but 'twas of women I spoke. Be silent, Francesco. I am aware that thou wouldst sooner talk of that Lucca thief's bill for armor, or his Grace of Ferrara's next shift to beat my price down; but I am inspired from on high—t'other side of this grape-vine—and I will preach. The Scripture doth inform us that woman was created as a companion and as an assistant to—hic—"

"I have read the Scriptures," says I angrily.

"Aha," says old Matteo, "but hast thou meditated upon them, and—in short, go to, boy; I am sixty and more; and I tell thee these shoon that pain thee so are but those that pinched me in my twenties. Here is the food. Aha, the goodly steam. Push over thy plate, Francesco—and thy mug, too."

He busied himself with the serving of the meal, spooning forth gigantic quantities of everything into my platter, and deluging my lap with wine. I thought eating would interrupt his harangue, which already grated like a file upon the wound in my soul; but not so; he spoke thickly at times, through masses of comestibles, but he spoke ever.

"Woman!" he burst forth like a culverin, at the end of a plate of soup. "God witness me, she hath a sad fate! Created to assist man, and sent into the world with most precise dictation even as to the manner in which she shall aid his efforts; able and eager to do that which lies within her power; and what befalls her? Mankind, grateful for her natural services, doth promptly reward her with a godship, for which she hath no more faculty than a sparrow; doth devote his life to serving her, whose only fulfillment is in serving him; and, because through ages she hath flattered his vanity by asking counsel on matters of which she herself hath no knowledge, doth appoint her his leader and guide through this dark world. Ha ha! O fool! O miserable! Here, push thy plate over. More wine. Yes. Yes, I tell thee! I am not John the Baptist, to be preaching in the desert—

"Nor is this all. When poor woman, most unjustly burdened with man's work (in addition to her own, for where is the man that can bear the children for her?), when she doth collapse, when she doth confess her mortality, what then? Why, forsooth, her natural protector, he whom she was born to follow, doth reproach Heaven that with his guide discredited, he can no longer journey toward the end of life, no longer strive to accomplish its purpose; he sits down on his hams, forsooth, and moans, and starves to death, like as not, and the woman with him; and 'tis her fault. Man, vain man, I spit thee forth."

He did so, and replaced him with a great chunk of bread. Also, he sawed the air with his arm.

"I would not have thee think," says his voice thickly, "that I have been guiltless with regard to the sex. Nay."

While he swallowed, I laughed at him sourly, and said that was as well, since his dealings in that regard were notorious through Italy.

"Ah," he rejoined, "but thou dost woefully misunderstand me, my Francesco. That which thou dost consider guilt, in common with the rest of fool humanity, is the behavior of my riper years which I exhibit to thee for an example. Hic. Nay, when I confess that I have been a bad man, I would inform thee that I have had affairs similar to this of thine."

I bolted up out of my chair and stood staring at him, on the edge of murder.

"Now, by God's hooks—"

He arose also, still chewing, and by pressure on my shoulders, combined with the gaze of his wrinkle-nested eyes, did force me back into my seat.

"Peace, peace," says Matteo. "I've given thee enough law on that affair; for two years I've let thee refuse a commission with me, and yet lead detachments of my men into murderous tight places rather than point out that what befell thee was thine own fault. But we are not immortal, and the time has come to stop wasting time."

"How dost thou know what befell me?"

"How does the whole company know it?" he asked blandly. "Why, forsooth, because what was left of thy men made the matter public. Think not that thou'rt the first to make the error, or to suffer from it. Half the men in the band have done the same—aye, the common privates; and all thy greater brain doth for thee, it appears, is to make thee more obstinate in thy mistake. For shame, young man! To err is human, especially in this matter of women; but to persist in error when it hath been demonstrated is to be an ass."

He drank another mug of wine, while I surveyed him sullenly.

"Do I not know?" he demanded. "Have not I, too, regarded myself as a low thing, a clod, an unaspiring earthworm, and demanded of some woman that she supply the noble qualities I did lack? And, discovering that she lacked them much more, have I not broken her heart by reproaches, and tried to get mine own skull broken in the next battle? Aye—forty years ago; and a merciful Lord permitted that I should only receive sixteen wounds, and live to know my folly— Now, enough of this, young man. Thy disappointment was thine own fault; I'll have thee cease sulking and be my lieutenant. To sulk will do thy soul no good."

"Whereas much will be accomplished," says I, sneering, "by two bands of fur around my cloak."

"I adjure thee, be not so selfish!" says Matteo, striking the table with his fist. "If it will do no good to thee, in thine opinion, I prithee consider me; nay, consideration I will have. By ——, it is my right after my nursing of thy fancies. We are all marching toward the accomplishment of our purpose in life. I as much as thou; there was no hesitancy on thy part to drag yon poor noblewoman out of her soft niche to thine assistance, and there shall be none on my part in dragging thee to mine."

The old man arose, called for the reckoning, and stood staring down at me resentfully, buttoning his shirt the while. I said nothing; sat with my chin on my hand, obstinate.

"Look you!" cried Matteo, leaning over me and thumping the table again. "It is the habit of youth to think itself unique in high aim, and noble ambition, and all the rest of it; but it is also the habit of youth to be wrong in all its opinions, mark me. Dost thou think, because I go not yearning about, brooding in corners, leading fool charges, and refusing lieutenancies, that I—even I, old Matteo Scarlatti with the dirty face and the goat's beard—have no vision of this life as a road leading to a shining city? Is it thy opinion, because I eschew goddesses and stick to women, that I believe I was born into this world to eat, drink, sweat, and knock strangers over the head for the behoof of other strangers? Art thou so sure that, because I've sense enough to snore when I can sleep, never in life do I lie awake and consider that my life heretofore could have been lived just as well by a bull? Nay, by the Creator his fingers, as much as thou am I convinced that there was a purpose in my creation; as much as thou am I resolved to die conscious of having fulfilled it; and equally do I require company and encouragement—"

A sergeant stepped from the tavern into the sunlight of the garden, blinking his eyes, and saluted.

"Well?"

"The men are mounted and ready, Captain."

"Good. We come."

I got to my feet, and as the sergeant retreated, faced Scarlatti across the table.

"And what is this purpose in thy life?" I asked him.

He was snapping the catch of his surcoat; at the question, his fingers ceased their employment, and the stern look in his eyes changed to one of—of despair.

For the moment, he regarded me in silence; and then, dropping his hands to his sides—

"I know not," says he.

As I have said, we throve mightily in alliance, Matteo and I; for it was a bare year ere he abandoned the pretence of my lieutenancy, and made me equally captain with himself.

Of life's purpose and such high matters, to my memory, we never spoke again; we did, in the line of our business, what was next to be done, in the manner which we considered best; such was the sum of our endeavor, and we prospered. Money and company are great drugs for soul-aches; of money I had plenty, and of company enough. Stella lived on, and for aught I know may be living still; I did not marry again, nor would I have married had she died. What women I had were glad to see me, and regretful when I went away; while I was with them, they amused me and they comforted me as best they knew; and while they remained faithful, they had no care for the wherewithal to live, to dress and to seek amusement after their kind.

So I came to my fortieth year.

ANNUNZIATA

CHAPTER XVIII

WAR OR—?

THERE was peace in the land that summer; for, with our aid, every armed noble north of Rome had fought to exhaustion. And, since these various wars had brought our repute to its highest state, Matteo and I were furthermore at peace within ourselves; save that he suffered from a fiery swelling of the joints, caused by an excess of wine and a lack of exercise. It was now his habit, in argument, to state his age at seventy-odd; moreover, he was not so prone to dispute as once. During this last campaign, ended that spring with the regiment in Pavia, he had left the direction of affairs mostly to me, yet at the end he seemed weary, for the first time in my memory of him; and instead of celebrating the peace after the manner of the armies, as was his wont, he preferred to sit in a soft chair at home, a beaker at his elbow and his mastiff at his feet, staring at the fire.

"I am growing old," he said testily, when I presented an offer of employment from Florence and demanded why he received glad news with such a dull eye. "What do I care for the needs of the Florentines?"

"They serve to supply the needs of the band," says I, rather haughty in my pride.

"And what care I for the needs of the band?" growls old Matteo, suffering evident pain with his knee. "I've wet-nursed it long enough; but for thee, I'd sell it, horse, foot and artillery— The only needs that regard me nowadays, Francesco, are mine own."

"I should say they were well filled," I told him. "Sure thou hast everything the heart of man could desire."

"Aye," says he, "except the opportunity to enjoy my possessions. Oh, merciful God!"

This time it was his ankle; I folded up the dispatch from Florence, and smiled at him.

"If that is the matter," I advised him, "take opportunity now, and go enjoy thy castle in the country."

"How can I enjoy it, with all our politics on my mind? Now if the troop were so—"

"I will manage them."

"And then," says Matteo, resentful of my quashing his new suggestion as to the selling of the band, "I should be all alone. I do detest solitude. One thinks."

"To think, in our condition, should be pleasant."

He looked at me sidewise.

"Aye," he said. "Should be. Aye."

And he returned to the contemplation of the fire; patting the head of his big dog, who regarded the flames with eyes similar to those of his master.

"Hast thou no relatives, no children, that might beguile thee?"

"Aye, many," says the old man.

"Send for one, then. It is not good for man to live alone."

He chuckled, rising stiffly from his chair.

" 'Tis not living that occupies my mind, Francesco," he said, "but dying. No matter for that, though. Come, let's take a turn about the town; tell me more of this Florentine matter as we ride. Since negotiations are toward, and thou'lt not consent to the selling of our stock-in-trade, I'd better stay here with thee."

But, the affliction of the joints increasing in him, he was forced to change his mind;

forced by his own contention that overdrinking had played no part in his malady, but that it came from the dampness of the city. A horse-litter was found for him, and a guard of a hundred cavalry provided, and south he went, cursing wonderfully at every jolt in the road, and from every halt sending back couriers with advice as to my dealings with the republic. I think, in pious treachery, he must have advised some friend in the Florentine councils that by waiting, they might come to purchase our force outright; for, after a month and a half, the negotiations fell to nothing; and before I could advise Scarlatti of this fact, arrived a demand from him that, since I was no longer occupied, I should redeem my promise to bear him company in his exile.

In fact, this command was not unwelcome. The summer was now full upon the city, and a hot season it was; moreover, I was weary of the mistress of my Pavian house. As to the band, it was as well under the command of our hired captain as under the eye of Scarlatti or myself—of late we had, in effect, ceased to concern ourselves with discipline, devoting our time to politics and strategy alone.

There was nothing, therefore, to hinder my going, and I went; starting with an escort, similar to Matteo's on a sunny first Sunday in June, and coming in sight of Scarlatti's stronghold in the evening of the third day.

Though, as I have said, it was summer, and the evenings scarce chill at all, he had a fire burning; before which he sat, looking at the embers.

"Ah, but there is winter in my bones," he said, when I remonstrated with him.

"At least," I joked, "some one hath been sweeping up the snow."

For in fact, his white hair and beard, ever tangled and matted since I had known him, were now combed out and smoothly brushed; moreover, the manifold wrinkles of his face which had seemed to retain some small part of the grime of all his many battles, were cleaned almost into a condition of transparence. He looked more frail, and older, but infinitely more comfortable, as witness, that he wore a silk shirt and a long robe of soft velvet, instead of his habitual linsey-woolsey, doublet and hose; he had his feet in shoon of fur, replacing the riding-boots from which he had never changed; and, by the smell, some one had mulled the wine at his elbow.

"Ah, my daughter," says he carelessly. "I am woundily glad to see thee again, Francesco. Was all well with the band?"

"Very well."

He thought for some time, stealing glances at me.

"The proposal to sell—" he began.

Now, beneath a calm surface, I had been much annoyed by his interference with the Florentine matter; 'twas this annoyance, which I could not avow in words because of the secrecy of his dealings, that made me burst forth upon him as now I did.

"The proposal is madness," I told him. "Why should we sell? What have we to gain by selling? We require no money. And what have we to lose by keeping the band?"

"There are our lives," says old Matteo. "There is thy life, rather; I do not think I shall command in the field again."

"My life is mine," I told him, "and if I lose it, the troop will be yours, to do with as seems best."

"Ah, my son, say not so."

"Well, I'll not consent to sell now. Is it reasonable, Matteo? We have ploughed and sown heretofore, planted the seed and tended it with blood and tears; shall we not wait for the harvest now?"

Scarlatti put his hands over his eyes.

"Aye, I suppose. But I want no harvest; peace is enough for me."

I threw back my head and laughed at him; meseemed this was such a poor boon, when all the sweets of the world were ours for the taking. Since that day under the grape arbor, I had embraced with both arms the faith Scarlatti had then declared; no longer were the world and the present day antechambers in time and space to an Eternity for which it behooved man to prepare; they were the world and the present day, and that sufficed me. And to hear my mentor talk thus of peace and the renunciation of earthly reward for effort as earthly as ours; to see him entangled (as I thought, in the very morass from which he had rescued me) was strange.

He looked at me piercingly as I laughed; for fear of offending him, I ceased, and began to formulate an explanation. But it was his turn now; to my astonishment, he laughed at me. Not very much—a half-dozen of dry chuckles, after which he turned his gaze once more to the flaming logs, and became grave.

In that moment meseemed, however, that his amusement had been far more consuming than mine own; before I could consider which strange fact further, we were interrupted. A door opened in the obscurity at the far end of the hall; light footsteps crossed the flagged floor toward us; the mastiff, crouched under a table, whined welcome, and a girl came into the circle of the firelight.

Scarlatti, twisting his neck, glanced at her, and looked back at the fire; I rose; the girl and I stood face to face, each waiting for the other to speak.

"I—am—Annunziata," says she at last.

Scarlatti roused himself at this, and turned about in his chair, grunting.

"My daughter," says he grudgingly. "Have rations been issued to the servants, girl?"

"Yes, father. They are at their meal now."

He said neither good nor bad.

"This is my fellow-captain, Francesco di Vitali—thou'st heard me speak of him."

"Yes, father."

"Are his quarters ready?"

"I saw to their preparation myself."

I think that the old man was about to grant her the comfort of " 'Tis well," when a great pain seized him in one of his wrists; he grasped it in his opposite hand, cursing frightfully, and with his elbow knocking over his beaker of wine. The girl, hastening forward, knelt by him, drew from under his chair a pot of ointment, and despite his oaths, threats, and implorations, did rub the painful limb until the curses became groans, and the groans, growing less and less, died into silence.

Then she arose, and stood undecided whether or not to leave, custom battling with courtesy.

"Will you be seated?" I asked her; and with a look at her father, who seemed to have drifted from pain into sleep, she took my chair, while I disposed myself on the oak bench by the fireside.

I forget whereof we chatted; of her liking for the castle, belike; of her journey thither from Leghorn, where she had been brought up by an aunt; of her father's illness, and such things. To old Matteo, however, the point was not whereof we talked, but that we talked at all.

I observed him open one old eye and survey us.

"If ye must chatter, go chatter in the garden," says he irritably; groaning as he disposed himself more comfortably in his chair.

The girl bolted to her feet again.

"I am for bed, father," she said as one who makes apology; but the old man made no reply.

"Matteo!" said I; but he replied not to that either; I think that, unaware he had dozed, he was offended that our converse had not included him.

"His advice is good, however," I said to the girl. " 'Tis woundily hot in here, with this fire; let us walk in the garden."

Again she hesitated between custom and inclination.

"My father—" she said, eyeing him doubtfully.

"It is thy father's order; and besides—hark!—he confirms it."

He had snored; the child looked at me and laughed.

"A cloak?" I asked. "Here—take mine." It was lying on the floor at my feet, and now I flung it about her; a vast thing of brocade, with fur on it such as the law confined to dukes. It was my cloak of ceremony, and the world had heard of it—she also, judging by the gasp she gave as it settled its folds about her. Her eyes, in the firelight, appeared to glow.

"Come then," says I, flinging a trailing tail of it over her shoulder. "Which is the garden door?"

It was warmer without than within, Matteo's fire notwithstanding; the memory of the day's sun, stored in the warm earth covered with flowers, filled the air, and in the moonlight the garden gained much from its frame of grim walls. I was not surprized, seeing it, that Matteo had gained the castle so easily; for in this imperfect world he who loveth to design walks and pleached alleys shall always lose his pleasaunce to one that preferreth to spend digging upon ditches which may be filled with water, old scythe-blades and dead dogs.

Here there was a long central promenade, paved with flags through whose cracks grass sprouted, making a soft cushion for the feet. Shoulder-high on each side stood banks of a fragrant flower; and to left and right little twisting paths let off—one to a sun-dial, which I saw gleaming white through the star-dusk. At the far end of the central alley there was a marble bench under a shelter of olive-trees; toward this the girl and I directed our steps—at first in silence, because I was unskilled in converse with her like, and furthermore, I was wondering what had come upon Matteo Scarlatti.

At last, I bethought me that she might have some clue to the strange state of his mind; and so I asked her gently if it were not strange that he behaved, in her regard, so coldly.

"Aye, nay," says she. "I expected naught else; sometimes now I wonder whether I should not leave him, for the sight of me maketh him so sad."

"Ah?"

"I do for him what I may, and indeed, Captain Francesco, I love him dearly; but I am the daughter of my mother, and she died when I was born."

To her understanding, this seemed to explain all; to me, it conveyed little meaning; and I suppose she heard this in my tone as I said—

"Aye?"

"She was the wife of his middle-age," Annunziata told me gravely: "he had loved none before, and hath loved none since; and she died when they had been wed scarce a year. 'Tis the memory of this makes him sad."

I shivered at enormity.

"Did he tell thee this?"

"Nay; he speaketh little to any one, and least of all to me; he will not even tell me of his fighting for the poor people against the nobles, though I have oft begged him. 'Twas my aunt, my mother's sister that raised me, did reassure me thus, when father sent for me, and I would not go, thinking him a stern, hard man."

I could make no reply; but at her innocent words, I looked from the hard certainty of my present state of grace, back to my former condition as I wallowed in the morasses of lies put forth by my elders; and, though I was yet barely acquainted with the likeness of her face, my heart sank on her account.

" 'Tis sad," says she.

"Aye, very sad."

Perhaps, had the silence endured, I should have burst forth, in the freshness of my rage, with the assurance that her aunt had lied to her; deceived her in this matter, and in all others of the kind, for no greater purpose than to be rid of the expense of her; but:

"Thou hast been with my father during all his great campaigns?" she asked timidly; and I escaped by that opening. The marble bench was before us now; we sat there, and for a good hour talked of battles; battles and, what did interest her more, the accomplishments to which they had led. Yet was she by no means averse to the tale of the fighting itself; even in the half-dark, I could perceive the strange glow of her eyes, when I recounted the affair in which we had gained this castle for her father; she made me promise that at another time I would show her the place at which Matteo and I and our ten men scaled the wall.

"It should be near here," I said, looking about me. "I remember that it was in a garden we threw our bombs. But we had little time— Who comes here?"

She rose quickly.

"I think it is a messenger from my father," she said, holding out her hand. "Belike he would talk with thee. And I must away. Good night. Good night."

I kissed the hand—it was extremely small, and I observed that it trembled; with the night-chill, methought. The lackey that had come for me stood bowing until I was ready to follow him.

"The Signor Captain Scarlatti—" he began.

"Is thy way through the great hall?" I asked the girl; and she said nay, that there was a postern, down a path to the left, and that led more nearly to her rooms.

"This fellow will go with thee, then," said I. "Good night."

And so I traversed the garden again, to rejoin old Matteo; he had awakened ill-tempered, it seemed; he was sitting bolt upright in his chair, and his wine-beaker was empty.

"Francesco!" he burst forth, as I took my former seat.

"Aye?"

"It was to accompany me thou didst come hither. That wench is a fool."

"She is young," said I, "but even so, she, awake, is a better companion than thyself asleep."

He glared at me, but I yawned and smiled, and he looked into the fire.

"I had had some thought," he said after a time, "of having thee marry one of my daughters; the matter of the inheritance of the troop would be simpler after my death.

The one I had in mind is wed already, it seems. This one resembles her mother; a fool."

At that moment, at those words, there was changed forever the destiny of Francesco Vitali; I mean, it was at those words I felt it change, not knowing what passed; even as one who now lies sick of a grave illness, may remember the moment when pain first flickered in him, scarce noticed. So at this speech, the like whereof I had heard a hundred times before, almost without attention, of a sudden I felt my blood revolt; wherefore I knew not, though into my mind's eye, as my bodily eyes surveyed old Matteo, there flashed a clear vision of Annunziata, up-stairs in her shift, praying for the comfort of her bereaved inconsolable sire.

My limbs commanded me; I got up.

"Bedtime," I told Scarlatti, as he turned his head toward me.

I expected protest, but he made none; one would have said that the fire intrigued him against his will; that in its embers lay the solution of some question whose answer he must seek whether he would or no. Now also his dog came whining over from the colder darkness, and put his head on the old man's knee.

"Good night," said Matteo.

THERE passed a week, of such bodily peace and comfort as I had never known, but of strange and increasing perturbation in my mind; I laid this malaise to the behavior of Scarlatti. For, though his pains disappeared under the ministrations of his daughter, who bound boiled herbs on his wrists, knees and ankles and forced him to drink the water thereof, yet he returned not by any means to his olden self. He was cheerful enough, especially when his winecup had been filled some dozen times in the evening; but even at such times, there overlaid his manner a sort of veil; even his jests came forth as though their maker were preoccupied with some other matter which was no jest. In the daytimes, when we rode abroad together with an escort to make circuit of his villages and do justice, this was well enough; if Matteo had changed, still the sunshine, and the face of nature, and the soldiers behind us and the common people, were the same, and in the crowd of them old Scarlatti was of little import. At nights, it was otherwise; and if sometimes the girl Annunziata was present about her bandaging, that strengthened, rather than lessened, my discomfort. Looking up in the midst of some reminiscence, or of some narrative designed to break the heavy silence, I would catch the glow of her eyes fixed upon me, questioning; even as mine own eyes questioned the bowed white head of her father; and as the old man's sought answer to his mysterious puzzle, in the fire.

It became my habit to seek bed early, and to lie awake. I found myself at all manner of monkish hours, engaged in the reiteration of my own achievements and of Scarlatti's, and in the codification of our gains and possessions; the which I had taken for granted, and had scarce considered, heretofore. I could find nothing in them to cause uneasiness—save that they did not cure it; but after I had reached this point, perhaps four days after my arrival, this failure itself began to increase my reasonless sense of insecurity.

After one such night, rising early into the first sunshine of a bright morning, I took the spiral stair that led upward from my room, rather than that which led downward to the great hall; and came forth atop a tower whose battlements commanded miles of country. The air was warm; already the sun had heated the stonework until the distant horizon, seen over the parapet, appeared to shimmer. At a less distance, I looked down upon the tops of fir-trees, spiring upward from the black shadow of their forest, through dark-tinted green to the tender new color of their tips; nearer, a little chain of lakes, with wild birds in flight graving silver lines upon them; and, under the walls of the castle itself, brown huts of the peasantry. At one door, a big brown mother was shelling peas and watching two babies, whereof the elder was teachhis junior to walk.

I was reflecting that, if Scarlatti could assert his right to the serfage of these people, their fecundity would save us much recruiting, when of a sudden I perceived that Annunziata had joined me at the parapet; that, elbows on its top, she too was regarding those dust-covered babes; that she was smiling as if in pleasure at them; and that her hair was red.

"Good morrow, Captain," says she.

"Good morrow."

I was astonished that I had o'erlooked

a beauty so flamboyant, and ascribed the fact to the dim light in which, heretofore, alone I had seen her. Doubtless 'twas thus also (I thought) that I had missed the real expression of her eyes, which now glowed not at all, but were blue and very merry.

"He will be in the puddle in a moment!" she cried. "No, Gaetano! Take thy brother's arm!"

"Dost thou know their names?" I asked, surprized.

She seemed surprized at my astonishment.

"Why, yes," says she, turning the blue eyes upon me (but now they were grave). "I have much to do with them. 'Tis not permitted to most of us to succor them in the great way you and my father have done; but—"

"But—" I began with my jaw hanging.

And there I ceased; turning away from her gaze of soft admiration without another word. I had begun, without thinking, to protest that no folk in all Italy harbored such a contempt and scorn for the peasantry, as did old Matteo and myself; it was by instinct also, that I choked back the words and held my peace. Of what use, came the justifying thought a moment later, to shatter such a pretty illusion, on such a glad morning, and for such a pretty girl? Why burst into yon pretty idyll of pea-shelling and bare-legs, with accusations that the peasants are traitors to their race, and that their peas are purchased by a renunciation of the rights of all mankind?

"They are so brave in their poverty," says the girl. "Somtimes they have not even the wherewithal to make their usual meal, that is little enough at best. Yet they do not complain; they eat what God sends and are thankful."

"And if He sends nothing, one day?"

"I have heard them return blessings for the sunshine, even."

"And if they chance to die of starvation?" I said.

She looked suddenly at me with pain in her eyes.

"Then," she said simply, "they thank God for their faith and salvation."

Again I balanced on the edge of speech, and again drew back. Aye. Aye; I felt it would have been kinder to strike her in the face with my fist, than to ask her what fool would expect resurrection from a God that could not provide soup.

"I came to say that breakfast is prepared," said Annunziata, smiling again as (I suppose she thought) my hard mood passed, leaving my gentle, sweet, humanity-loving self once more visible. "Shall we go down, Signor Francesco?"

I knew that, once below, she would vanish from my sight and be no more seen—now that I thought on the matter, I had not seen her once, in the daytime, since I had been in the castle. She was in the kitchens, the pantries, the buttery—and the village; playing servant to her father and to me; and helping the Almighty look after her slaves. In that moment, I pitied her as the informed pity the misguided; and yet, in the strength, I felt a strange desire for more experience of her weakness.

"Hast thou no leisure for a walk in the gardens before nightfall?" I asked, as we passed down the first marches of the stair. "It grows chill in the evenings."

My hand was on her arm, and I felt her tremble. In the ray from an arrow-slit, I saw that she had flushed, and that her face was averted.

"In the forenoon, I am occupied," says she. "But—"

"But—?"

We were now in the full light of a corridor.

"But in the afternoon," said Annunziata, looking me in the face and, as it were, striving to force the red to retire from her cheeks, "it would give me much pleasure."

"So be it, then."

And so it was. After nonmete, while her father, like the rest of the castle, dozed in the first embrace of siesta, we walked forth from the great hall, and seated ourselves again on the bench beneath the olive-trees. It had been placed so that only the cooler sun of afternoon could shine upon it; for the present, were we in shadow, and from the terrace whereon the garden was laid, could look peaceably out at the countryside baking in the heat; or up at the shimmering column of the north tower, whose hot white stone rose into the blue sky close at hand. Doves were fluttering and cooing about the corbels of its upper platform; from time to time they would knock down showers of sweet white petals from a flowering vine that grew in the niches of the masonry. Before us, in that half of the garden upon which the sun now fell, droned many bees, busy about the tall green spires of hollyhock; black-and-yellow burrowing centers to each dusty flower of white or pink.

Annunziata leaned forward, her chin on her hands; I, lying back against the gray-powdered trunk of an olive, watched her lazily without her knowledge. Her red hair was gathered in a net of plain silk, without jewels; her ear peeped forth unburdened by a ring, and almost transparent against the light; the line of her cheek was strangely soft and innocent.

As for myself, for the first time since my arrival at the castle, I felt utterly contented and at peace; I had little envy either to speak or to move, and should perhaps have followed my inclination but for a knot of the tree trunk which, after some minutes, began to bore most uncomfortably into my back.

At the sound of my moving, the girl turned her head and smiled at me.

"One is very well here," said I: at which she sighed and leaned back against the olive which formed the other post of the shelter.

"'Tis true," she said; "and oft I take shame to myself for my impatience."

"Impatience?"

"Yes," says she, her eyes meeting mine. "Sometimes meseems I am so slothful; that my life is so small and mean, compared with what it might well be. The world is so large and so busy; and here am I, doing no more than see food well cooked and that the servants rob us not."

"Aye."

There was silence between us, while my memory, rousing itself from the calm repose of my soul, rummaged in the past for some parallel to her utterance. Some one of this girl's age; a mercer; myself as apprentice to that old man whose name I had forgotten, listening to the clatter of duke's messengers in the night, and considering the meanness of my own occupation, by the side of theirs.

Of a sudden, I chuckled.

"Ah, mock me not!" cried Annunziata, sitting upright and turning full toward me.

"Nay, nay. Never."

She attended some further words, but I gave her none; it was too pleasant to look at the garden, down whose path the tide of sunlight was creeping slowly toward our feet; to survey the girl at my side, moreover, as she sat there, pretty and virginal, her fingers playing together in her lap, and her eyes shining, in the intensity of her pretty delusions.

"I can not explain to thee," she said, "but I shall sound ungrateful for the blessings I have; comfort, and pretty clothes, and no fear for the future. And this supervision of my father's house, of which it seems to thee I do complain, indeed, Signor Francesco, 'tis that is my only comfort; if I can do naught in the world myself, at least I can aid one with that ability."

"Aye, aye,"

I could not help but smile at her eagerness, once so familiar to myself; for my memory presented me, in that moment, nothing of the agony of that condition. After a while, Annunziata smiled also, if doubtfully; her hands unclasped themselves, and one fell from her lap to lie white upon the moss-grown stone. She seemed very young; I put my hand over hers.

"All this will pass," I told her.

"What will pass?"

I wished I had said naught; because the labor of expounding what I meant seemed so disproportioned to the good to be done thereby.

"This desire to go forth and fight dragons," I told her, taking pleasure the while in the thin scarlet curve of her lips, "it will pass with age."

"So will life itself!"

"'Tis very true," I told her lightly; but she was in the highest earnest; she even pulled her hand away, and rose.

"I do devoutly hope," she said, "that with me, they shall pass together, France—Signor Francesco; for a life holding naught but—"

"'Twas not worth the trouble to add yon 'Signor' to my name," I interrupted. "Francesco is long enough, especially on such an afternoon. Be seated again, I beg of thee."

Her eyes regarded me with a strange and pleasant softness, but she would not sit down.

"I am restless," she said. "Let us walk a little."

"Ah, prithee—"

"Come!" she commanded, stamping her red-heeled shoe, and yet smiling so that a dimple sprang into being on her cheek.

So I arose unwillingly and protesting that I was an old man; at which she appeared to take offense.

"But I have gray hair," I told her, pointing to some that was beginning to show over my temples. Holding my arm, she looked at it, and I perceived her lips quiver. "Where do we go now? It is not meet to force the aged to long marches in the sun."

She led me into the side-path at whose end the sun-dial stood; it was shady, by reason of the shelter of the citadel's wall, and the hedge of hollyhocks. She said nothing; neither did I; we patroled that walk some dozen times; her eyes on her shoe-buckles as they passed into view and out again under the edge of her skirt; mine on her bent head, and the white nape of her neck where, despite the net, certain small curls appeared.

"This is enough of walking," I pronounced at last, taking my station at one side of the sun-dial, and leaning heavily thereupon.

She mounted the two marble steps likewise, and stood at the other side of the copper slab; which, dulled with weather, yet had gloss enough to reflect the white of her elbow. A faun and a nymph embracing, I do remember, held up the dial's finger; and between the scattered hours could be read the words:

CARPE DIEM: FUGIT ÆSTAS

"'Tis that should occupy thy thoughts, my child," I said, pointing to the motto.

"What is't?" she asked, without a glance.

"'Tis a Latin admonition to put summer to its proper use, instead of mocking it with planning of great deeds."

"And what," says Annunziata slowly, "is the use of summer?"

"Ah, that—" I began; and ceased with a gasp.

It had been my intent to tell her that yon was a question to be asked of a young man; but between one word and the next, as if some great dam had broken, a dozen strange thoughts and emotions flooded my breast; aye, 'twas there, and not in my brain, that they broke loose. In a flash, despite the gray hairs of which I had boasted a minute agone—and in truth there were not so many of them then—I was a young man; my blood blazed with fury against any unlicked infant that might be younger. I pictured this radiant girl in the arms of some lout whose feet and hands were yet too big for him. I saw her innocence, so refreshing to me in my disillusion, fused valuelessly with the ignorance of this imaginary swain— Ah, God! The fortifications of disbelief, so laboriously builded to protect me from the inclemencies of life, became suddenly a howling wilderness, where naught could sustain life but the cool water of credulity, whereof this brimming vessel was to pass into the hands of one that needed it not.

I moved suddenly.

Startled by my silence, Annunziata turned; there was no veil before the eyes with which I looked at her; she saw—she must have seen—all of my soul that was within her comprehension. Reading it, she sighed; tremulously she smiled; then, as I moved yarely around the column toward her, murmured, as if frightened:

"Nay, nay!"

We stood there, she with her hands a little raised, pleadingly; tears in her eyes, and the tide of blood rising again in her cheeks. But her nay was no refusal; 'twas only the shrinking of her dreams from the touch of reality; when the knowledge of which latter dawned still more upon her, she did cover her face with her hands, and thus blindly fled down the path.

I followed her, calling, but she was gone.

I stood dazed for a moment at the juncture of the paths; then walked slowly to the marble bench under the olive-trees and sat down.

The sun had finished its traverse of the garden, there was no longer magic abroad; the flowers were flowers, the landscape was in its colors of every-day; and, behind the still sunny blue of the sky, one could see the promise that soon night should swallow them all.

THERE was, so to say, a calm before the storm; I mean, that the peculiar uneasiness and apprehension of spirit under which I had labored from my first coming to the castle was now gone from me. No longer did Matteo Scarlatti his strange behavior puzzle and disquiet; I knew well what was in his mind; knew moreover that I had known it days since, and had kept the knowledge of my knowledge from myself, for terror of falling into the same condition. 'Twas that the approach of death had shown him (as meeting with Annunziata had shown me) the arid barrenness of life without illusion, without belief in aught untouchable by the hands. He had perceived too late what I (returning thanks to God) had seen timely; that an existence free from the pain of disappointment, but lacking also the joys to which faith is prerequisite, must be null and dreary; a worm's life, rendered only the more tawdry by cloth of gold. The prism which he now found to enclose him, he had built with his own mind, as a palace whence, aloof, he could look down with scorn upon a humanity whose woes he should not share; and now, willing to share woe in full measure so only his cold soul might be warmed with a little delight, he found himself upon the branchless path to the grave, where he should know neither one nor the other. What he sought in the embers was a road that should lead from his chill eyrie within sight of that comfortable world where men loved though they were betrayed; starved, but feasted anon; wept, but were glad.

I meditated on these matters, my heart divided between pity for Scarlatti and exultation at mine own deliverance, what time the dusk fell, and the sky changed from blue to purple, and from purple to velvet black set with stars. They reminded me, those twinkling points spangling the heavens, of other nights, when I had indeed despaired; I remembered turning hot eyes to the sky, when the ways of Stella had afflicted me; I saw myself again, horse dragged bridlewise at the side of Scarlatti's that evening before the convent, threatening the calm planets with my fist, for that my angelic and spiritual Anita had confessed herself mortal. How little and temporary had been these despairs, compared with that which possessed old Matteo now; which, but for the coming of Annunziata, must soon or late have fastened upon me!

Annunziata—

At the thought of her, I smiled; she would bring me no disillusion; I knew she was but flesh, whereas she charmed me in that she knew it not; believing all mankind, and with the pride of youth, herself in particular, to be compound of nobility, justice, truth, self-sacrifice, purity and such airy matters. She was to me, as I stood there in the darkness considering her, like a sweet branch of almond blossom to a gardener's boy assigned to the dunghills; by her gay ignorance atoning for my bitter knowledge.

Annunziata—

My heart swelled, and to dissemble the thankful joy of my deliverance, I walked slow and disposedly about the garden, hands clutching the furred lapels of my gown; face set, as though I considered some high judicious matter. I see myself now.

Annunziata—

I saw myself then, as foil to her qualities; having most clearly in mind the gay tilt of her chin, and the gallant carriage of her head. She moved, in both mind and body, with the careless grace of one that hath never stumbled, and hath no fear of such a happening; which same lack of caution permitted likewise her eyes to be quite clear, hiding nothing; and the curve of her lips so soft. At that moment, I imagined her in her room, pouring forth her joy at our garden parley in frank tears or earnest adoration of the Virgin—while I, to whom the benefit was so much greater, walked with a scowl of artifice, lest even the blind, bland night should discover my happiness and make attack thereon.

According to the custom of men whose present pleaseth them, I turned my mind forgivingly toward the past, and with charitable memory envisaged myself in that same sweet tender condition; a cool green pasture I must have been, before the tired eyes of my father and that old rogue of a Porsini; at thought of whose selfish perfidy toward me, my mind, tuned to harmony, recoiled.

Aye, to them and their like had I served as an oasis in the desert; a fresh spring in the midst of the salt ocean; a friend in a world of enemies. And how had they rewarded me for this solace I gave them? Marry, as our ancestors rewarded such animals as, of their wild bounty, gave them food or carriage; with deception and violence, designed to perpetuate generosity by force. Rage rose in me as I counted the scars of mind and body at whose cost I had escaped—escaped only to choke in the desert myself, but for God his mercy.

Annunziata—

Slowly, waveringly, like a bell flung into deep water, my heart sank; for, at first quite clearly and without passion, then in a frenzy of denial, I saw myself, come to the age of my father and Porsini, using her as they had used me.

This could not be so; the cases, I assured myself aloud, were different; the difference struck the eye, it was patent. I loved her; I was woe for that innocence of hers, so charming, and so fatally doomed to perish at touch of the world. I was to guard her from disillusion, not thrust it upon her. I protested to myself; and, even while so doing, knew that I lied.

I protested the more, furiously; it was strange that, raising my hand to my forehead, I found it damp with sweat; moreover, through all my thinking, there came the words, senseless yet persistent: "God is not mocked." I banished them, but they returned, iterant. What had they to do with me?

My mind stumbled, ran, and thrust its way in the direction I commanded it; while I, in the body, stumbled and ran from the garden, through a gate that to my knowledge I had never remarked, on to a wide flagged platform, such as once was used for the stance of catapults, and which now held guns. Here, amid the outward and visible signs of man's practical duty toward his brother, I felt comfort and peace for a moment; meseemed that my obligation was to myself alone, and that, for the torments of my youth, the world was my debtor in such measure as I could enforce the debt. And by God (I thought, grinning at the wrapped muzzles of the cannon, and sinking my teeth in my lips) I was a powerful and a relentless creditor!

Then Stella came to my mind; and the head of panic raised itself again. What was I to say of her, to Annunziata that knew not of her existence? And what was I to do?

Was the first act in my protection of the girl's ignorance to be the exposition of this sorry affair?

The sweat broke forth again upon my brow.

"I can not live without her," came a hoarse voice that made me start, so did its tone and its sentiment vary from those which I thought to be mine own.

Again, hastily, I began to walk; black-winged thoughts flocking, fluttering, fighting in my brain; while through the turmoil of them came that one everlasting murmur:

"God is not mocked."

IT WAS late, perhaps an hour before midnight, when I burst into the great hall.

"Scarlatti!" I cried, careless who heard the agony of my call; though in truth the whole castle was abed.

He was still in his chair before the fire, and as I came up to him, the questioning face he had turned from the red glow smiled upon me.

"Well, my son?" said he, more mildly than it was his latter custom to speak.

I know not what I told him, save that it was all, and that by this time, I was convinced of my damnation, and of my concomitant right to shriek. I suppose that (like most men in similar states, though they admit it not) I tore my hair, and called upon my God, and protested my own virtues and the cruelty of Fate.

Through it all, old Matteo sat quiet, some vestige of his smile still visible upon his face; for which, after a little, I cursed him, and even laid violent hands upon his shoulder. How bony it was under the velvet! How dry and slippery and thin was his flesh!

"Peace, peace!" says he at this. "Contain thyself, Francesco. The matter—"

"—can be arranged." I snarled at him, for he had thrown this into the torrent of my despair some minutes before. "Aye—and at what cost?"

"Why, none. Wed the girl; say naught; keep her away from Rometia; 'tis done every day."

"Will naught make thee see, old blind crow?" I cried. "What is that—a nothing! Can I unlearn what I have learned of this world; knowing what I do, can I act as if I were ignorant? And how shall I pretend to her, at my very side, concerning the business of every-day? Shall she not know within a year that thou and I, her gods, do commonly lie, murder—aye—and would betray for great enough advantage? As for the peasants that so please her—"

Scarlatti raised a weary hand to his brow.

"In God's name, then, keep her away from thy side," says he testily. "The wench is a fool, at best."

"I have had enow of wise women—and wise men to boot," I told him, sitting heavily at the fireside.

There was a long silence.

"Those we call fools," says I again at last, "are God's own children, Matteo; thou knowest it; we have been of their number; and what shall come to him that debaucheth them for his own lust?"

"He shall be damned," says the old man's creaking voice.

The fire flared up, sputtered, and died to its accustomed smoldering.

"In the name of ———, tell me, what I am to do?" I demanded wildly of a sudden. "I am in Hell, and I have looked into Paradise; and yet I know that one step of mine thither, shall make it change to another Hell! Matteo! Matteo!"

He did not move, save to shake his head slowly from side to side, without turning his eyes upon me; again in my rage, I gripped his shoulders; and as I shook him, I saw that the smile was overspreading his face once again.

"Go to, go to, young man," he chuckled, as, releasing him, I stepped back. "Go to. I am over seventy. He-he-he!"

"What in the devil's name has that to do with it?"

Now he looked full at me, with an expression of enjoyed malice indescribable, and for the first time in long (also for the last time in my hearing) laughed loudly.

"Much," he chuckled. "Much—"

There was a knock at the door; repeated while my mocking preceptor and I stared one at the other.

"Well?" I demanded at last.

The servant that entered was sleepy, and yawned as he spoke.

"A messenger, your Honors."

It was some time ere I could bring myself back to earth.

"At this hour?"

"May it please the Captain, yes. He hath ridden hard."

"From Florence, my lord!" says another voice; and without waiting permission, there entered the messenger himself; as dusty and travel-stained a figure as ever I saw; his riding boots about his heels, his cloak a-missing, his hat likewise, and his long sword clinking as it trailed after him upon the flags. He held in his left hand, and presented to me bowing, a document whereof the seal and superscription were alike lost in a plaster of mud.

"What is't?" demanded old Matteo, ere I had opened the missive.

It is a strange instance of the abstraction of my mind, that, reading the dispatch in the firelight, some time passed ere I could gather the purport. The crabbed letters made words, the words were simple; but, until I had perused the document some three times, no meaning came forth from the parchment.

"Doth it concern the troop?" asked Matteo impatiently. "What is the message?"

"There is no need that the messenger should wait," said I, turning to the servant. "Take him away, you, and see that he is refreshed and hath a good bed."

"I was told to say the matter was full urgent," put forth the Florentine.

"Aye."

"Good night, Signor."

"Will they buy the troop, or what is it?" burst out old Matteo. "Read it, Francesco; hell's griddles, man, make haste!"

It was some matter of a new war; it appeared that certain powerful exiles of the city had banded together with troops, and were threatening attack. Gradually my brain was coming to comprehend this alien matter, and I explained it to Scarlatti.

"But will they buy the troop?"

"They say naught of that; this is only to demand help, and quickly."

I looked up from the letter and met Matteo's gaze fixed upon me at first piercingly; then, as I returned it, doubtfully.

"What is thine intention, Francesco?" he asked, beginning to bite his nails. "I—I can not take the field again yet; I know not—"

"They say the enemy is within twenty miles of the city," I broke in; and at the thought of battle-array, felt my soul rise from the dim shadow of despondency, into the red light of a savage joy. Finding no assurance as to what was to be, my mind flung itself upon what was to do.

"They will need aid quickly," says Matteo.

"They shall have it," I told him, getting up.

He peered at me.

"Harkee, Matteo; I will go to them tonight."

"Tonight? But—"

"Aye, tonight; and not because of their necessity." I pulled down my doublet, and talked rapidly and loudly; lest my impulse should escape me. "I have grown soft sitting here by thy chimney-corner, Scarlatti.

'Tis well enough for thee, but in a younger man, it produceth the megrims, as thou'st seen."

"Ah, my son—"

It was not likely I should let him do what he intended, and assure me that this conclusion was in deception of myself.

"Be quiet, old fool!" I stormed at him. "This is no time for talk and chatter. I will act. I will act. Ring the bell!"

He took the cord of it, but, hesitating to pull, looked at me piteously.

"Francesco!"

I cursed, and rang myself; the peal of the bell wailed through the empty corridors; after a moment, a door banged, and there was the noise of hurrying servants.

"To mount and arm a troop at this hour of the night—" says old Matteo feebly.

"Who spoke of a troop?"

"The wench will get up to see what's toward," says he, looking away from me.

"I shall be gone."

"What, alone?"

"Aye, alone! By ——, Scarlatti, thou makest me to laugh! What horror, to ride unescorted! Are we old women? Aye, 'tis that we are becoming; old women with the mully-grubs— Fetch me my old plain armor, you man; that in the little cupboard; and have my horse brought forth."

"But, Francesco—" Scarlatti attempted again, stretching forth his hands forlornly.

"Be quiet!" I roared at him.

Ah, poor tormented wretch that I was; miserable man, trying by loud words to drown out the voice of Fate, and with the speed of a horse to evade the inevitable! Like a cur with his tail tied to a pewter pot, I was fleeing from that which I carried with me; seeking escape from something that was part of myself.

The servants, bringing my armor, shrank from me; they had reason, for when one of them fumbled with a strap, I knocked him half-senseless across the room, to distract my mind. Down in the courtyard (whither I went without another word to Matteo, my companion of so many years) I ceased never to speak, mostly curses, so that the ostlers thought me raving mad, as indeed I was. They flung the gates open, crouching and praying God to speed me; whereupon I laughed and asked Him to damn them all; near broke my horse's jaw with the wrench upon his bridle, and galloped forth. The stone of the archway jarred my helmet as I went through, too frenzied to bow my head; and, tearing down the loose stoned incline from the gate toward the village, I did enjoy the pain. It was evidence that such things as stone walls, horses, and helmets were dominant in the world, as I craved to believe; for it was not such things as these that I feared. Nay, 'twas to them and their like that I was fleeing—from what? From myself. Alas! Alas! O useless flight!

I did not take the direct road for Florence, because carts had used it greatly in the spring, and their ruts remained so deep that it was impossible to go faster than at a walk; whereas naught gave me peace but a mad gallop, as fast as spurs could drive. This solace I found upon the road leading west, instead of north—I supposed that I could strike off it later, in the direction I desired; though in truth the matter concerned me little then—or ever. Forty miles I covered, without drawing rein; forty miles before the dawn shot the sky with sudden red, which streaks are mine only remembrance of that ride. Since my departure from the castle, I had kept my mind in turmoil. As the first ray from the sun struck the landscape, bringing forth the mist-wet cypresses from the blackness of night, so also meseemed that a light was shining into the savior darkness of my mind, picking out the form of Annunziata from that obscurity.

Though, for a long time, my horse's breath had been roaring in his nostrils, in desperation I gored him again with the spurs; he made a mighty effort; I roweled him ever, and of a sudden he groaned.

In the midst of his gallop, he flung up his head; then, of a sudden, I felt his foreknees crumple—

I WAS in bed.

Rather (for of late my beds had been great canopied affairs with silken blankets) I was on a pallet in a whitewashed room containing, besides, but one stool and one great black crucifix; the which things astonished me, looming into my sight as it were from a fog. I wist not, in that moment, who I was or what; but certes 'twas not my wont to wake in such surroundings.

Yet was the room not quite unfamiliar, though meseemed it lacked a table with candles thereon; I raised myself upon one elbow to look for these furnishments, and was instant seized by a frightful dizziness, an unbearable nausea, and a feeling as of hammers beating the back of my brain. Through the roaring darkness which swept forward to engulf me came the sounds of a slammed door, and of voices:

"He wakes—*Dei gratia*—praise be to God! — water — the cordial — chafe his wrists." And I glimpsed the face of a queer old man, bald, wrinkled and monkey-like, that terrified me despite its look of compassion.

"Grasp his hands!" cried some one, "he is yet delirious!"

"Nay," said another voice, "that is past; he is weak as a kitten—I scarce felt that blow, and 'twas on my sore eye. Give him the cordial. A very little. Turn his head sidewise."

I felt something poured into my mouth, and heard the command to swallow it, which was impossible to be done. My tongue and my throat-muscles twitched, but could not compass the full motion; however, I breathed; and it is the virtue of our cordial (made for the succor of the helpless rather than for a carnal delight) that it refresheth as well through the lungs as through the stomach.

Gradually, the world ceased to revolve about me; by degrees, I became aware that I was lying on my right side, and that there was pain in all my limbs. Cautiously opening my eyes upon the four men that stood near my bed, I knew at once in what place I was. A monastery. Moreover, I recalled where, when and why I had seen the like of this room—in the convent. Anita. Matteo Scarlatti—

Annunziata!

As if spurred, I reared again; the monks, with cries of alarm, caught me in their arms and tried to force me back upon the bed; I resisted, babbling, and, commanded by the chief of them, they let me sit up, supported.

"I am in haste," I told them.

"Ah, my son—" protested he who resembled the monkey.

"How came I here?"

"It was a fall from a horse," said the senior gently. "A good Christian merchant found thee lying in the road, dead as he thought—"

"I am not dead; and moreover, I must hasten to—"

The monks looked at me pityingly.

"Thy business can scarce press so much," says the wrinkled brother, "and—"

"It is a matter of hours, fool!"

"Then there would be no use in thy rising, even if it were to be permitted."

I began to struggle again.

"It is to be seen ye know not who I am. Permitted! I—"

"We know thou art a poor broken—"

"I am Il Giovane! I am Francesco di Vitali, the captain of free-lances! Help me to my feet!"

They surveyed me pityingly, but made no move to obey.

"Ye believe me not!" I stormed at them, "but 'twill not be long ere there come seekers for me—Matteo Scarlatti will be here to demand an accounting before forty-eight hours—"

"My son," broke in the senior firmly, "peace. This is foolish talk, and will do thee a mischief. Already thou hast told us thy name—and much more—in thy ravings. As for the rest, it is already twenty-five days thou hast been here."

I could not speak in my horror and amazement; I looked wildly from one face to another, seeking evidence that this was a lie; but it was evident to be perceived that all agreed in it as truth.

"Moreover, it will be long yet ere thou canst be moved; therefore, have patience; fretting and storming will but delay thee longer."

"But I can not stay here!" I wailed.

"Lay him back upon the bed. Begone, brethren. I would be alone with this man."

He of the monkey face, and the two others, bowed, smiled at me, and retired, closing the door of the cell softly behind them. The monk remaining—he hath since become abbot, and 'tis at his command I have performed this work—came to the side of my pallet and rested a cool hand upon my brow.

"Thou hast no further need to flee," he said gently. "This place is sanctuary for the pursued of the spirit, no less than for those of the flesh. Thou art among friends, and in safety."

"I can not lie still here!"

"Peace, poor brother," says the monk. "All is well."

His hand was over my eyes now, and I lacked the strength to remove it; I lay there in darkness. Gradually as I had wakened from my swoon, the thoughts which had urged me to rise and flee, grew less poignant; the pains that pervaded my body came to me, as it were, from a distance greater and greater; at last, I slept. This was a sleep without dreams; waking hours later, when the night had fallen and a thin tallow dip burned in the cell, the nightmares of my waking mind returned.

Desperately, I sought refuge in sleep again; it was useless; the thought of Annunziata persisted in my brain; the knowledge that I could neither have her nor live without her was more certain than it had been heretofore. And at the thought of my dilemma of damnation, I began to groan.

There came the sound of a book's closing; a movement of sandals on the stone floor; the flame of the dip flickered, and Brother Martin's hand rested once more upon my brow.

"Peace, peace," says he.

The tag of that fighting bishop, who used a mace that he might shed no blood, came into my mind, and I flung it at him:

"*Pax, pax, et non est pax.*"

"Aye," says Brother Martin. "He that said that was in the world, as thou hast been; seeking peace among the warriors, surety among the uncertain, immortality among mortals, perfection in the imperfect. What end can there be to such a search, save bitter failure?"

I saw the end of his discourse and, eyes closed, I smiled mockingly. How did I despise him, this skirted, shaven thing, pale and sapless, that yet presumed to counsel me in my agony!

"'Tis a common thought with such as thee," he said, though I had said naught, "and the most part curse their counselor and depart. Thank God that he hath stilled the devil's itch in thy limbs, my son; their speed was toward hell."

"What dost thou know of the matter?" I cried at him furiously.

"All," says the monk.

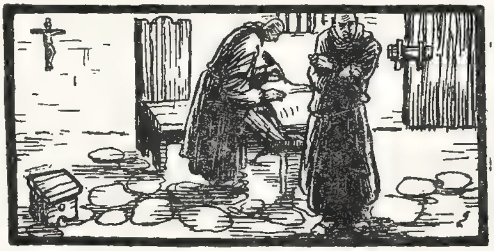
"Aye—what I have raved; but what is it to thee? What dost thou know, a man like thou art—"

He drew himself up, and towered above me.

"I know this," he said sternly, "that thou liest here groaning, weeping, praying for death, from one cause, and one only. There was born in thee, as in the meanest of God's children, that desire for higher things which doth distinguish us from the beasts; and thy mortality hath sent thee seeking them in the flesh, after the manner of the flesh. The spirit in thee hath demanded love, beauty and truth in their perfection; because thou hast not found them, thy soul faints. These things are not the attributes of mortals, but of the Most High God; long enough hast thou sought them where they are not; turn now to find them where they are!"

I lay there, still grinning, untouched by the fire of his conviction; and when he had done:

"—— your sermons," I muttered; and turned my face to the wall. . . .



FOR years I had worn, out of the same vanity as makes some men curl their hair, and others to leave it unkempt, the steel gorget known as a *collaretto di Caradosso;* and for some reason, when the rest of my clothes had been removed, this had been left hanging on a nail in my cell-wall. Perhaps it was considered that aught other place in the monastery would be defiled by its violent memories—the leather lining had a few old stains of blood, and there were three dents on its left side dating from days when folk had really dared try to kill me; in any case, there it hung before my eyes, dully shining in the sunlight or in the flicker of the candle while succeeding brethren brought me bitter concoctions of herbs against the numbness of my right side, and read sweet words from the Fathers to my inattentive soul.

"Hear, on this same point," mumbled one Ambrosius, a bright morning some week after my awakening, "the words of the blessed and venerable Origen; a man not given to wild statement or exaggeration—"

But I was thinking of Luigi Caradosso, who had been old but most unblessed; a great liar to boot, but a swordsman for the ages—inventor of the cut to which my gorget was the answer. After fifty years of hammering on men's heads and bellies like a blacksmith on an anvil, it had occurred to him (while drunk) that since God hath placed the ear higher than the chin, some half-inch of flesh must be left uncovered by the ordinary neckpiece; and by much practise snipping the wicks off lighted candles, he had attained the gracious state of being able to hit that half-inch and sever the great vein under it, nine fights out of ten, ahorse or afoot. I suppose he killed in this manner enough men to have repopulated a city, before some one preferred to live even at the cost of altering the tradition-hallowed armor.

Then, when the alteration was in common use, when *collaretti* were as frequent and as essential as hose, lo humanity (as witness the three dents on my gorget) still trying old Caradosso's cut because it had once been good.

The monk looked up over his spectacles and smiled at me—in sympathy. It appears I had laughed.

"Ah, brother," says he, "dost thou begin to taste the holy joy?"

"Mightily," I told him. "Read on."

"I will take up 'Thomas à Kempis,'" says he, hastily laying down his first tome and picking up a weightier still, "if the which were better known, joy would be the rule of this sad world. H'm—"

While he read on, my thoughts flew forward to this Florentine business in which I had been interrupted by this accident; back to our great coup at Mantua; to that other at Siena; to others still, greater or smaller, in different towns, with different governments, from tyrants to republics—all victories enriching us, adding to our fame, giving us the things to be desired in life; and all founded on the stupidity of mankind. The Florentine affair would go as had the others; after that—

So I thought on; the green flame of contempt for all mortals springing up fiercely in my breast, and seeming to replace the fire of life which had so nearly gone out, and which, even now, burned so feebly. The numbness seemed to have gone from my side; doubtless it had retreated whither it had been settled so long—in my soul. For an instant, some voice within seemed to whisper, "But then, how camest thou here?"; I silenced it by leaving thought for action, and getting out of bed.

The religious, ceasing to mumble, regarded me with vast eyes made vaster by his spectacles.

"But—" says he in a gasp; and then, dropping his book and rising, he cried out:

"A miracle! A miracle!"

"Give me, I pray you, my clothes," says I; and he tore open the door. But it was not with any thought of obeying me—nay, he merely stood there, waving his arms, calling all sorts of brethren with all sorts of names, and repeating his annunciation:

"A miracle! A miracle!"

I was putting on my gorget, meantime; a thrill shot through me at the cool touch of its steel under my ears, and the dry click of its clasp seemed to me more eloquent than all the maunderings to which I had just listened; of greater authority than Origen, more to the point than Thomas.

However, there was not an entire lack of sharp and decisive voices in the monastery, silent as it was by habit, however cracked and high-pitched might be the tones of Ambrosius, my late companion. From down the passage, of a sudden I heard Brother Martin, swishing down the narrow corridor so that his rosary clicked against the walls, and ordering silence and a retreat to cells.

The next moment, he was standing at the cell door, a taller man than I; nose in the air and blue eyes watching me from under shaggy brows.

"How now, brother?" says he. "What jape is this?"

We regarded each other, breathing hard.

"No jape," says I carelessly. "It is just that, feeling myself better, thanks to your most excellent care and, doubtless to the intercession—"

"It is a poor return for our care, to mock at our belief," says Martin sternly.

"'Tis but a week since you were preaching me sermons against mine," I told him. "But no matter. Be it said in short that I am better; and that with many thanks, I would fain go about my business. As, meseems, I told you, important affairs await me in Florence; after I have attended to them, I shall trust to return hither with something more substantial to leave here, than a poor broken—"

"Say no more," said Brother Martin. "It is enough."

He bent his head and began to bite his thumb-nail; likewise, settling his shoulder, he leaned against the doorpost; and, to favor comfort still more in this position, he crossed one leg past the other and stood in the attitude of a loafer at a street-corner. With his shabby robe, more than a little too short for him; his sandals from which the great-toes stuck out and up absurdly; with his tonsure in view rather than his eyes, which were fixed on the flagstones, he scarce seemed an awe-inspiring figure; yet there was that about him as he slouched, which made me draw two breaths for speech, and dismiss them wordless. He did not move; nor did I; there was, however, in that room, a sense of great issues in debate.

But the flags were cold, and there was a wind from the cell's window; moreover, descending from my state of innocence like Adam, suddenly I felt foolish, standing there in my shirt and a steel gorget.

"If I could have my clothes—"

Martin gave no sign that he had heard; it was only after another minute or so, when I had begun to get angry, that he dropped his thumb from his mouth, hoisted himself away from his support, and looked me in the face. It was a piercing gaze; to which I replied with a look that expressed—expressed—no doubt many things.

"With regard to my—"

"Yes," said Martin, less to me, it seemed than to himself. "Yes— Your clothes were much muddied, Signor Francesco, and they are not now fit to wear. I will give orders that they be cleaned forthwith. Meanwhile—"

His voice trailed off in indecision, and his eyes fixed on mine again, still searchingly, but with, beside, a strange look of supplication.

"What now?" I said roughly.

"Meanwhile," he answered slowly, "there is a—young man; came hither a week ago to see thee. A—a messenger of sorts."

"A messenger? And he has been kept from me?"

"We thought thee in no state—"

I interrupted him, starting to pace the cell in mine old manner.

"Well, by ——— body, a fine affair! I am beholden to you, brother, but— From whom does he come? Where is he? 'Tis scarce to be expected of your like to comprehend such matters, but messengers to me are urgent. I must see him at once!"

Martin was still searching my face.

"That is your wish?"

"Immediately! But—stay. I can not receive him in my shirt."

"We have no lay vestments," said the monk; and considered. "But—I can lend thee a robe."

"A robe—a sheet—anything!" says I, wondering whether this young man were from Florence, from Pavia or—my mind checked a little—from old Scarlatti. "But haste, good brother, I pray."

And so it was in a snuff-colored gown such as I wear at this minute, but decorated above the edge of its *capuche* by the gleam of my steel collar, that I received the young man Martin presently led to the cell. He was a tall fellow with black hair, a dead-white skin and a red mouth; not over eighteen, I thought as I looked at him; dressed in such clothes as give one the idea—how, I know not—that their owner is of high family, fallen low in wealth: Meseemed also that despite some care, the youth's dress bore more stains of travel than might have been expected after his week of rest.

"Good morrow," says I, stretching out my hand for the letter which protruded from his girdle.

But he clapped his own hand on it and stared at me. Now I wondered slightly (again considering his week awaiting me) at the haggard and weary blaze of his eyes.

"Art thou become monk?" he asked.

I gave a roar of laughter.

"Not quite," says I. "Of what thou seest, young man, only the gorget is mine—that and the letter in thy belt. And that is Scarlatti's seal, unless I mistake. Come, hand it to me. How is he?"

"I do not know," says the youth, still devouring me with his eyes.

There was no superscription on the letter.

"Well, how was he a week ago?" I asked testily, breaking the seals.

"I do not know that either. It is more than a week that I have been searching for thee. I have been to Florence seeking thee; and to every hospital and monastery between yon and the castle. I swore not to return without—news of thee."

I glanced at him with sympathy as, the last seal broken, I moved over to the window with my letter.

"Well, Scarlatti—" I began; meaning to say that old Matteo would reward good service as woundily as he punished bad; some such thing; but never did I finish the stupidity. A ray of light fell across the written sheet—there were not many words thereon—and in that instant my voice died in my throat. Perhaps two words, perhaps three, were thus flicked into my eyes by the finger of the sun; they were enough, without more, without signature. My heart seemed to swell, to beat wildly, and then to stop; I flung out a hand wherewith to steady myself against the wall, and of purpose gritted my knuckles into the rough stone. The letter fluttered down to the floor—

I know it is wearisome, O brother of the future, to hear what passed in the mind of one mindless these two hundred years; and yet how is it wearier than the dull count of what passed through his muscles and his bones, now likewise dust?

Patience, patience; there is little more—of either.

Have I said that, for the last week of my convalescence, I had thought never of Annunziata Scarlatti? It was so; why, I know not—she was clear enough, and the thought of her agonizing enough, in my mind when I first woke; thereafter, unto the receipt of this letter from her, recollection had grown dimmer. Perhaps, since oft the afflicted body doth force the mind to share its pains, sometimes as when the burden is too heavy, may not the mind by forgetfulness aid the body with its burden? Aye; for when Ambrosius had started to cry his miracle, was I not cynic as ever I had been, joyously regarding the mastery of men as an end—as the end—and sufficient?

A dangerous perch for the soul, as I had found before; as now I found again.

"Signor Francesco!" came the voice of Martin from a great distance, "art thou suffering?"

His hand was on my elbow, too. As the black fog that had shrouded his face to mine eyes cleared away, I felt the hard pressure of his fingers.

"Nay—nay," I told him; and on the heels of my word, the young man who had given me the letter and who now stood at Martin's side, eyes blazing, lips trembling, hands clenching and unclenching strangely—he spoke.

"Wilt thou return?" says he.

There was that in his tone which it is ill-luck to hear when one arm is hampered; by instinct, ere I replied, I shook myself free of Martin, and glanced at the boy's waist for a dagger. He had none.

"What's that to thee?" I answered; but no more, because this was not impertinence. Men are not impertinent on the rack.

"To me?" cried the boy, taking a step forward and raising his hands clutching in the air. "To me! Ah, thou dear God!"

"Hush!" says Brother Martin.

"Hush! I'll not hush— Listen, Francesco Vitali; hear me; I would not curse thee; it may be— Thou knowest me not; my name is Lodovico della Fortezza Bianca; I am the son of a gentleman."

He was then the son of the very gentleman from whom Matteo Scarlatti had stolen the Fortezza Bianca itself.

" 'Tis not me thou shouldst curse for the loss of the castle," I told him.

"I curse no one; 'tis not of that I speak. Hear me, Francesco Vitali! Scarlatti took away at once my father and all I had of wealth in the world, and I did not curse him. I have thought since that—"

"—Thou'rt in love with his daughter," says I.

He had meant to say that his adoration of Annunziata had fallen on him as Heaven's reward for his forbearance from un-Christian resentment; now, the words taken out of his mouth, he stood with great eyes fixed on me, nodding dumbly. I had envy to laugh in his face, triumphantly; but I did not.

"Well?" I asked instead. "Was it I that mixed thee a love-philter? Shouldst thou curse me? And why wert thou such a fool as to bring me this letter, an thy heart—"

"Because I love her!" he burst out. "What dost thou know of such a thing? Because I love her! I would have her happy, though I died ten thousand more deaths than the ten thousand I have died this last month. To thee, it is to be a fool. What canst thou know of it?"

He was angering me, but I smiled.

"Enough, at least, not to kill myself even once, for a woman that loves me not, however I may adore—"

" 'Tis false! Before thou—before thou came, she did love me; if thou return not, she will love me again. 'Tis me she loves; it could not be otherwise; from the beginning of time we were made—"

"Pish!" says I. "Come, boy; thou dost sicken me. In another year—when thou'rt twenty, twenty-one, some such thing—all this will be forgotten. Thou'lt look back and laugh—and so will she."

He stopped his harangue and stood looking at me; then in a dazed, slow voice, said—

"I am twenty-five."

It appeared indeed that he would say no more, and I began to turn away. But he clutched my sleeve and held it.

"Hear me," says Lodovico, still slowly, dropping forth words like poison from a bottle. "I will not tell thee more of that, Vitali; I was a fool, knowing the quality of thy heart. Consider only that I am young and honest—"

He was but on the fringe of the great sore in my soul, but I winced and wrenched my arm away.

"And I am to give thee Annunziata for thine honesty, like a penny from a found purse?"

"I ask no such thing. It is not in thy power, at best. All thou, and folk like thee, can do, is to take."

"Well?"

"I implore thee, do not take Annunziata Scarlatti."

Now I broke into a sweat about the forehead, and in the palms of the hands; not from weakness, but from pure agony; I stood before the young man reft of the power of speech. With his last words, touching some hidden spring in my memory, he had caused to flash before me, all at the one time, yet each distinct, my talk with Annunziata by the sun-dial; the battlement whereon I had walked after her flight; old Scarlatti in his hall; my mad ride from temptation through the dawn. Other words than his, moreover, were in my ears; Annunziata's, and Matteo's and my own.

Could I have spoken, it would have been to beg—not to command—this stripling that he should wait; give me time; but he went on.

"Thou canst take Annunziata Scarlatti; but if thou do, Vitali, I will pray night and morning that thy soul rot everlastingly in hell! 'Tis not for my sake. Hark, I will covenant with thee never to—to see her again. I will swear it before God, Vitali—only, leave her in peace. Thou knowest her, how she is young; how she is innocent; how—"

Meseemed that a stranger's voice, ghastly harsh and hoarse, broke in with a cry—

"Who better?"

For an instant, Lodovico too paused as if we had been interrupted; but then it was to me he replied.

"Then," says he slowly, "what art thou? What swamp shalt thou make of that fair meadow?"

The cell had vanished from my sight behind a mist of red—all save the pale face of this youth who addressed me. I could not see Brother Martin, though I knew it was his hand which now fell on my shoulder, and his voice that said sharply:

"My son, my son, go! It is enough!"

"I will not go until he shall have told me," says the youth. "Hast thou not sufficient without this one thing, O Captain? There are cities still to be taken—old cities that will never feel another invasion. There are castles and palaces by the dozen that have changed masters before; women that can give thee much—and lose nothing."

"I am to have nothing above the common, eh?" says that stranger's voice, as if strangled.

"Thou are not to have *her!*" cried Lodovico della Fortezza Bianca, thrusting his face up to mine. "Thou—who fired the cannon into the crowd at Montemurlo! Thou—who couldst fight on the side of Bloody Pietro in Tuscany, and against Tommaso di Frangini at Rome! Thou, with the deaths—"

The red mist was closing in about his face and his working lips. Brother Martin's voice was urgent:

"Son, I command thee, cease! If there are deaths on this man's hands, there are also lives. Begone, I tell thee! It is enough!"

"It is enough that he is inured to treason, that he believes in no God, no man, no woman, nor no devil; and that to soothe his thirst for faith he would drag a girl's soul down to hell with his own!"

It was my voice now that struggled to speak; but the words merged into a hoarse cry, and of a sudden, as at a trumpet blast, the red mist lifted both from my mind's eye and from those of the body. I saw Lodovico as he was—straight, clean, quivering with this unselfish passion that warred with his every desire; I saw myself—

"He hath soiled himself with the things of earth," cries the boy. "I bid him only keep to that which he hath chosen."

Ah, but that was easier to be said than to be done. An hour ago, aye—though, even then, for how long would the things of earth alone have sufficed me? Now—dust and ashes! Dust and ashes!

Martin looked quickly up into my face.

“Art thou done now?” he said to the young man grimly. “If so, go!”

“He hath not yet answered me,” says Lodovico.

And so we stood for a long time, while I tried to nod my head, or say aye, or to smile, or otherwise promise that never more in this world would I see her whom I thought my only hope of salvation here or hereafter. Certes it were easy to be done; but for mine own pride, I hesitated, waiting until I should be able to tell this child that I had known all this before; that I had fought this fight and won it, ere he drove me to the battle again; that I was more than a slayer of rabble, a fighter for or against noble rogues. *Vanitas! Vanitas!*

For while I hesitated, there came to me this thought—that I could exact no such promise from this lad as he had offered; that Annunziata should be his, who—

My heart swelled, the red mist rolled before me; I flung out my hands and sprang blindly forward; felt Lodovico’s throat in my grip; and, within the second, had him crushed into a corner of the cell, beating his head against the stonework of the walls what time I tried to tear the life out of him. He was gurgling and choking—his nails tore the side of my face—his knee drove into my stomach— Brother Martin was shouting, and there were hands wrenching at my shoulders—in vain—in vain! I had him, by God, this innocent, this drinker at pure founts; already his struggles had ceased.

I dropped my hands from his throat and let the monks pull me away. That old fool of an Ambrosius was howling like a calf; half a dozen others, in the cell, in the doorway and in the corridor, were staring with white faces and making the sign of the cross. Brother Martin was holding me in his powerful arms; and the brother who looked like a monkey was bending over Lodovico where he lay. Seemingly, my rising had taken longer than I knew, or I had been longer risen; they had given the young man aromatics, and he was stirring.

“It is well,” said the leech. “We will take him away?”

Martin nodded.

“Then return and bandage this brother. The wound in his head hath reopened.”

The side of my face was wet; I put my hand to it, and ’twas indeed with blood; whereof much more, I saw, was dripping upon my snuff-colored robe, even down as far as the girdle.

“Let us sit,” says Martin gravely; and, alone, his arm still about me, we seated ourselves on the truckle-bed.

“Thou hast been saved from a great sin, by God his grace, my son.”

I laughed weakly.

“I shall need more of it ere long, Father—Brother — whatever thou art — Martin. There are two paths before me: One I will not take; the other leads, as *he* said, to a worse sin than—murder.”

“Why take either?”

There was a long silence.

“Thou hast damned my sermons, and I give thee no more; but the one I preached thee may stay a little in thy mind. Thou sayest there is naught but unhappiness and damnation on the paths of the world. Stay here, and find peace.”

I did not want peace; ’twas of Annunziata I had need; and yet what should it profit me if I gained the whole world, and lost her soul? Martin said no more. My head was heavy, my heart sick; my fingers were rasped by contact with the rough stuff of my robe; and about my neck there seemed to be an intolerable weight.”

“Take off my gorget, I asked . . .

CHAPTER XIX

PEACE

SO, SO; here is my penance completed.

Now, calm in mind as I was frenzied before, I come again to the end of my earthly pilgrimage; able this time to survey it as I could not when new from its completion in the flesh.

What shall I say?

Turning to the first pages of this my story, the ink whereof is now some eighteen months dry, the words and thoughts they do expound seem strangely unfamiliar. That young noble—I forget his likeness; moreover, the features of his agony are become dim in my mind; and above all, I marvel at my sureness of a cure for him—

My mind, that should be pacified and made steadfast by confession, is oddly perturbed. At the end of a journey whose very chronicling hath harrowed me, I sit here at peace, in an alcove of the cloister about which pigeons coo and over whose calm flags pace none but my brethren in quietude; yet—yet—the cheeks of that young noble were so red, despite his errors; while we who rest from the warfare of the world are become pale almost out of the likeness in which we were created.

Certes we are at peace; but is it the peace of victory, or of defeat?

Ah, dear friend yet unborn, sweet reader hereof, pity me for that I have labored long and have accomplished nothing. Forgive me that, proposing a treatise upon the successful conduct of life, I have demonstrated but mine own failure therein, and that now I come to confess perplexity deep as, or deeper than, thine!

If happiness doth not reside in the things of this earth, why doth that instinct which is as much part of mortals as arms and legs, send us questing first in the world; aye, first—and last?

Why—

But questioning is not my office.

I have told what hath been commanded.

MY FATHER—old Porsini—Stella and her mother—the Duke Alessandro—Anita—poor Lucio that I slew with these hands, God rest him—Matteo Scarlatti and his daughter—my son that hath grown to manhood and that I shall never see; all these have I shown as alien figures thrusting me, each in his own fashion, hither and yon from my path through life.

O egotism of man!

Had they not paths, as clearly marked as mine, from which I did equally lead them away? Were they not, as much as myself, in quest of happiness, and did I not fail them even as they failed me? Shall they be blamed if, as I struggled to save my soul, they struggled likewise to save their own? Were they not as much my victims, as they were my oppressors?

Aye; and most of them are yet in the hurly-burly, suffering still; my son for one—

Some do say, and it is coming to be admitted for the greater glory of God, that the stars in the sky are great worlds, and that in the vast of space they do hurtle to and fro, never colliding; each upon a circuit described in the beginning by the Eternal Wisdom, and kept inviolate by the Almighty Power.

Why, when dead planets of rock are thus, is poor frail man, alive and sensitive, condemned to move in an orbit that must intersect not one, but many others?

Why, when the universe whirls with such precision, should its crawling lord alone be left to blunder without plan?

So, so: it is finished; and by way of penance I have written that for which I might well be burned, were it read (as it may not be) before two hundred years. Perhaps even after such a time they may bring forth my bones to the faggots; it hath been done before. . . .

Ah, well! It will be in spring or summer, unless the winter be exceeding mild; and who shall raise me once more from the darkness, hath my present blessing.

The earth is vanity; so transient and deceitful that it can not provide a dwelling for true joy; but when I have been gone from it so long, meseems my mortal dust will rejoice in the breeze and the sunlight; the bird-songs and the soft, sweet smell of the grass.

END.

ASCARI OF ABYSSINIA

by Kingsley Moses

STRANGEST and fiercest looking of all fighting men are the Ascari of Abyssinia, legionaries from the one independent empire of Africa.

Very tall—few are less than six feet in height—and thin almost to emaciation these Abyssinians have skins of gleaming ebony blackness. But, oddly enough, in feature and hair they are distinctly Caucasian, with thin lips, straight noses and hair neither oily nor kinky. The proud boast of their race is that they are Semites, lineal descendants of the great King Solomon and the resplendent Queen of Sheba. Their emperor, indeed, once dismissed a rash legate from Haiti who referred to His Majesty as a Negro.

In uniform they follow the custom of our own Army in their blouses and breeches of bleached white khaki and immaculately wrapped putties. But upon their heads they wear a *tarboosh*—a glorified fez—a foot high, and about their waists is wrapped a wide *cummerbund*, a sash eight feet long woven of native sheep's wool. And, in odd contrast to the perfect precision of the rest of their costume, upon their feet they wear—nothing. The enormously long feet, with huge, widely separated toes, are almost ridiculously incongruous in contrast to the rest of their uniform. Crossed bandoliers, a knife in the *cummerbund*, a rifle and a curved scimitar swinging from the left hip, complete their quite adequate equipment. And over rocky outcroppings of the Atlas Mountains or through the deep, hot sands of the Sahara their marching pace seldom falls below five miles an hour. And this in a land where 140 degrees Fahrenheit is no unusual temperature.

Like the Roman legions of old, the Ascari hire themselves out to whatever nation will pay for their services. The writer's experience with them was under the Crown of Savoy; but they are as likely as not with the French tricolor this year; and anywhere at all next. With no commissioned officers, they are completely under the control of their non-coms, *shumbasci* and *balukbasci*, and discipline is preserved with no other court-martial aid than the bull-whip and the bayonet. One grizzled sergeant-major has seen service in sixteen different wars. Little he cares under what flag he serves so long as there is good fighting.

For recreation in their homeland, when temporarily out of work they amuse themselves by hunting lions—the Abyssinian lion is yet the king of his clan—without the effete aid of firearms. Hemming in the great beast with their spears, they await the awful last charge. He who is directly in the lion's path dies—naturally. But the rest drag down the lion. Later, in bivouac, they are eager to rehearse this scene for the visitor; one actor, draped in the dead lion's skin, submitting to the prodding of blunt spears with roars of delight. If a few of his friends, carried away by exhilaration, fire their rifles so close as to burn his flesh and bruise him with their blank cartridges—well, it's all in fun anyhow.

The only drawback to the use of the Ascari on European battlefields is the fact that they have never learned the meaning of the word "halt." A charge which can not be stopped until every man is mortally wounded may be very effective today, but can hardly be employed again tomorrow. With such defenders, though, it is not likely that Abyssinia will soon be conquered; as in the past both England and Italy have learned to their cost.

The Fallacy of "Faro"

A Western Story by a Westerner

By Walter J. Coburn

EVEN after twenty years had dimmed men's memories, Chinook, Montana, still pointed out "Faro" Furnell as the man who had killed Jack Manton. Lest the significance of this long-standing memory be lost, let it be explained that killers and killings were commonplace and ordinarily soon forgotten. Eighty-five per cent. of the men buried inside the whitewashed picket fence that marked the cow-town's boot-hill had died with their boots on and a smoking gun in their hand. Yet their names and the names of the men who killed them had long since been forgotten. Only the killing of Jack Manton stood forth in any semblance of clarity. Faro Furnell still remained in the minds of men as "the man who killed Jack Manton."

By the same token, Jack Manton would be recalled as the only man who ever successfully rode the Circle C Dun. This in a country where outlaw horses were as numerous as owls in a prairie-dog town and bronc riders were many and skillful. Where the fame of bad horse or top rider was short-lived, eclipsed by the performance of his successors. Where they sang a little song:

Never was a outlaw that never got rode,
Never was a cowboy that never got throwed.

Yet Jack Manton's famous ride became cow-country legend. The twenty-year-old echoes of Faro Furnell's gun still rang in the ears of old-timers.

And now, after twenty years of rain and snow and wind and heat had whitened the rudely carved slab above Jack Manton's grave, the gray-haired loungers squatting in the shade in front of the Last Chance Saloon, squinting from under wide hat-brims into the last yellowing rays of a setting sun, saw a ghost. The ghost of Jack Manton!

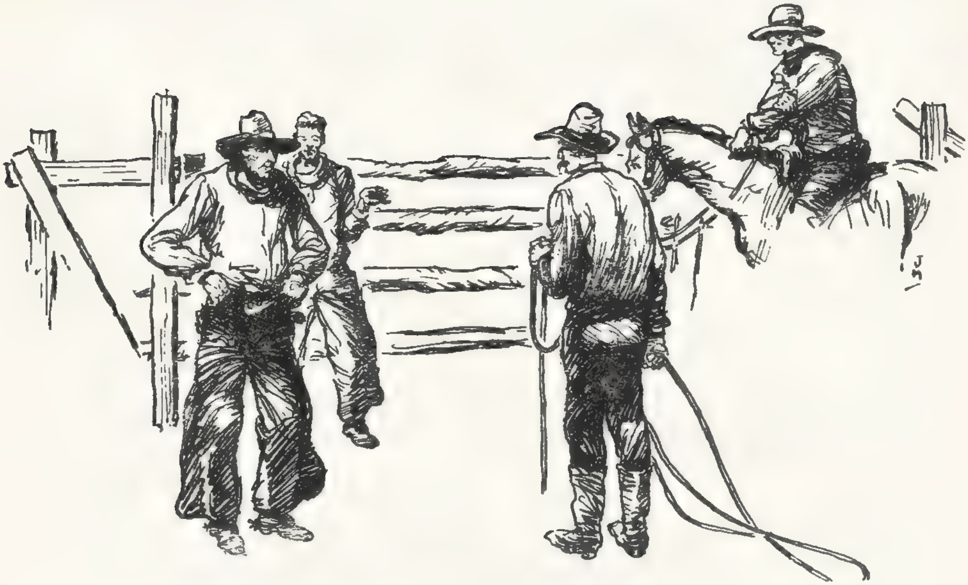
Cigarets grew cold. One or two of the loungers quit whittling on soft pine sticks and pocketed their horn-handled stock-knives. No man spoke as the straight-backed, dust-covered rider came down the street, his rangy, sweat-streaked dun-colored horse traveling toward the feed barn at a running walk.

In passing, the smooth-shaven leather-tanned youth who rode the dun gave them an impersonal glance. If he was aware of any unusual scrutiny on their part, he gave no sign. They saw him disappear into the cool shadow of the feed barn. Then, as if bidden by some voice, they straggled into the Last Chance for a drink.

"The spittin' image," said the first man who broke a heavy silence. "The spittin' image uh Jack Manton."

"An' he was forkin' a dun-colored hoss."

"Who's payin' fer this round of drinks, anyhow?" inquired a rheumatic saloon man who had once been a trail boss. The clump



of high boot heels had awakened him from sound sleep and he was a trifle peevish.

"This round," said a white-bearded spokesman, "will be on the house. Us boys jest seen a speerit. Jack Manton's ghost jest rid down the street on a hoss that's a dead ringer fer the Circle C Dun."

"Manton's dead," announced the saloon man coldly. "So's the Circle C Dun. If you danged ol' sage-hen roosters aims to job me, you made a shore bad guess. Last night I lays awake listenin' to the hollerin' of a —— sheep-herder that's got snakes. I ain't in no humor to be pestered by a herd of broke-down cow-hands seein' spooks. Decorate the mahogany with some green money."

Then the ghost of Jack Manton came through the short swinging doors.

A rangy, long-muscled man of perhaps twenty-five, a trifle bow-legged, with lean flanks and wide shoulders. His features were sharply cut, his eyes were yellowish in color, deep set under straight black brows. Under the dusty brim of his Stetson his hair showed black and straight as that of an Indian. The face, eyes and hair of Jack Manton, quarter-breed Indian.

This dust-streaked replica of a dead man stood there for a moment, just inside the doorway. His mouth, a straight line under slightly hooked nose, twisted upward at one corner. It might have been a smile. More likely it was not. The men at the bar swiftly recalled Jack Manton's smile. He had been of the breed that smile across gun sights.

The yellow eyes of the newcomer swept the line of men at the bar in swift appraisal. Then he stepped to the bar and took his place apart from the others.

"The house is jest buyin', stranger," announced the man behind the bar. "Get in?"

"Whisky," nodded the newcomer, and his yellow eyes chilled the warmth of the saloon man's welcoming grin. He was pointedly ignoring the presence of the other men on his side of the bar.

Because they were old-timers in a country that minds its own business, and because they had known Jack Manton and his ways, they, in turn, paid no further attention to this living man who bore him such a marked resemblance. Yet to a man they were tingling from battered hat-crown to runover boot-heels with curiosity.

Jack Manton had never spoken of a son. Still, there was nothing strange about that, for Manton was close-mouthed. Granting that this was Manton's son, why was he in Chinook? Would he ask the whereabouts of Faro Furnell? Would he kill the man who had killed his father? Had he purposely ridden a buckskin horse with black mane and tail that men might know that he was the son of Jack Manton, the only man who had ever ridden the Circle C Dun?

"Well, boys," said the saloon man, "here's how!"

They drank. One of the group, with what was meant to be an air of boredom, ambled outside and down the street. Those who remained saw the mouth of the stranger again quirk upward at one corner in what might have been a smile. They knew that he knew that the cowpuncher had drifted out to locate Faro Furnell and warn him.

"Hot weather fer June," rumbled the saloon man as he plunged empty glasses into a tub of water beneath the bar, set them out again in a row, and commenced drying them with a somewhat soiled bar towel.

"Is it?" The stranger's tone was flat and cold.

"Hotter'n some Junes," persisted the saloon man, who had been trail boss in the days when steers had long horns and bushy tails and were off-colored. Days of gun-fanners and long hair. Buckskin days. A grim look crept into the depths of his blue-gray eyes as he went on. "Hotter'n some Junes, cooler'n others. As I was tellin' Faro Furnell this mornin', afore he pulled out fer the Bear Paws, it's gonna rain some day."

If the saloon man had hoped to break the stranger's silent reserve by the mention of Faro Furnell's name, he failed. The yellow eyes did not change expression nor did he show the slightest interest in the statement that Jack Manton's killer had, that morning, left for the Bear Paw Mountains.

The saloon man, known throughout the cow country as "Turkey Track" Tolliver, had lied about the departure of Faro Furnell. Proof of the lie now shambled through the swinging doors of the Last Chance.

Faded overalls. Rusty, runover boots. Tobacco-spotted shirt. A seamed, leathery face that had needed a shave for several days. He held a shapeless hat in his hand and his uncovered hair was the color of snow, faintly streaked with yellow. The eyes under the bushy white brows were blue in color, bleared and bloodshot from too much liquor.

This was Faro Furnell, or rather, the wreck of what had once been Faro Furnell, a care-free, good-natured cowpuncher who had risen to the title of wagon-boss during the days when it took "savvy" and plenty of it to run a round-up. During the winter, it had been his wont to deal faro bank in town. Hence the "Faro" handle to his surname.

That was before he killed Jack Manton, that sunny spring morning twenty years ago. Killed him because Manton, not content with riding the Circle C Dun until he had broken the wicked spirit of the animal, had spurred and quirted the buckskin colored outlaw until the horse dropped dead between his legs.

Those who saw what happened claim that Furnell went white as the chalk cliffs behind him, and that some terrible emotion had paralyzed his power of speech. No man had ever before seen Faro Furnell like that, nor, in the years that followed, did any one ever again see the terrible look distort his face as it did that day when he faced Jack Manton across the foam-flecked, spur-ripped carcass of the Circle C Dun.

They had seen Manton smile as he shot from the hip. They had seen Furnell crumple, his gun spitting fire as he fell. Jack Manton, his thin lips twisting in that odd smile of his, was already dead when he pitched face forward to lie across the sweaty carcass of the horse he had ridden to death.

Because Faro Furnell was not a man who can kill and forget, it had broken him. The process of that insidious breaking had begun before his gun barrel had quit smoking.

Tender hands had carried him into the bed-tent and dressed the wound in his chest.

"God forgive me," they heard him say over and over as they probed for the bullet with unskilled hands and crude tools, "I've killed a human over a two-bit man-killin' horse!"

Like some awful, insidious poison, that offense against that commandment of God that says, "Thou Shalt Not Kill," ate into the heart and brain of Faro Furnell. That burden of guilt, self-imposed, had made of him the wreck that now stood uncertainly within the doorway of the Last Chance.

Those at the bar, all of them men who had known Faro Furnell when he had been a man, now watched, unable to talk or move, helpless to prevent that palsied spasm that shook his liquor-sodden body as he looked at the yellow-eyed cowpuncher who stood there watching him, smiling as Jack Manton had smiled.

Behind the bar, Turkey Track Tolliver

laid down his bar towel, and before the unbroken movement was completed, his hand held a Colt .45. That second, and during the seconds that followed, the man who was the "spittin' image" of Jack Manton stood on the brink of the valley of death, though he was unaware of it, for Tolliver's gun was below the level of the bar.

Pity for Faro Furnell held them all speechless as they watched, scarce breathing. Then Furnell's voice, hoarse as a crow's, rasped in the dead silence of the bar-room.

"You're — a — Manton?"

"My name," said the man at the bar, "is Jack Manton."

"I'm Furnell. Faro Furnell. The man that killed a Jack Manton." Turkey Track Tolliver's fingers tightened about his gun butt. Furnell, swaying slightly as if he were overcome with dizziness, stood there, waiting. His lips, trying to smile, trembled.

Yet there was no trace of fear in the derelict's bleared eyes as he waited for the bullet whose crash would end his life. Rather, it was the expectancy of a sick man who awaits a medicine whose swift bitterness will bring relief to a tortured body.

But the man with the yellow eyes did not shoot. He studied the man who waited, studied him with a cold appraisal that made the other men want to wipe the twisted smile from his lips with a bullet. Then, without a word to Furnell, he turned his back on the shambling old drunkard and, ignoring the others, faced the bartender.

"Another whisky. I come a long ways and I'm dry." There was a look of mockery in his yellow eyes as he saw Turkey Track Tolliver's right hand come up empty from under the bar.

Manton drank alone and paid for his drink while Furnell, without moving from his tracks, watched. He did not even seem to catch the inference of the turned back. He was still waiting.

"I'm goin' to be in town for quite a spell," Manton told Tolliver. "Where's a good place to stop?"

"There's the jail," suggested Turkey Track Tolliver grimly, "er the boot-hill. You'll find fit company either place."

With his left hand, the grizzled bartender took Manton's empty glass and tossed it to the floor, his eyes holding the yellow gaze of the other man as the glass shattered to bits.

In certain parts of the country where negro trade is not desired, a colored customer in a saloon is treated thus.

A barely perceptible narrowing of Manton's yellow eyes was the only visible sign that he had noticed the insult.

It was then that Faro Furnell walked slowly to the bar and stood alongside Jack Manton. His eyes seemed less bleary as he smiled at Tolliver.

"I'm obliged, Turkey Track," he said huskily, "fer takin' up my quarrel. But don't do it no more."

Tolliver nodded, inwardly sick with pity for this broken man who was making a terrific effort to get a grip on shattered nerves and sluggish body that he might appear a man before this stranger.

"I'm the man that killed Jack Manton," he repeated, facing the yellow-eyed man.

"Yeah?" The younger man's tone was coldly indifferent. "What of it?"

"Ain't you Manton's son?"

"I may be Jack Manton's son, mister, but I'm not —— fool enough to take a potshot at an old barroom bum like you. Men get hung for things like that. I bet you don't even pack a gun."

"Not since the day I downed Jack Manton, I ain't had one in my hand." A slight tremor came into Faro Furnell's voice. He had been drunk the night before and his emotions were as sensitive as a raw wound. Tolliver shoved a glass and bottle toward him but he shook his head in firm denial.

"Juries is hard on folks that shoots a man that ain't heeled," Manton went on. "What's the use, anyhow, in killin' off a man that's li'ble to die any night uh jimjams? My old man musta had both hands tied when he let a thing like you kill him."

And in the silence that followed that remark, the man with the yellow eyes swaggered outside and crossed to the Chinaman's place for food.

"Fer Gawd's sake, pard," muttered Tolliver, pouring out a tall glass full of raw whisky and shoving it into Furnell's shaking hand. "Git outside uh this. Yuh need it."

But Faro Furnell shook his head, smiling shakily at the man behind the bar.

"I'm through drinkin', Turkey Track," he said. "Through drinkin' fer a spell."

Without another word of explanation, Faro Furnell shambled off to a little back room where Tolliver kept his mops and buckets and brooms. Here also was an old cot, mended with wire and strips of rawhide, covered by a straw tick and a few lumpy "sougan" quilts. A cracked mirror, a tin basin set on an empty beer keg, and a wobbly old kitchen chair completed the furnishings of the tiny room that served as a storeroom for mops and living quarters for Faro Furnell who now eked out a liquor-sodden existence as swamper for Turkey Track Tolliver.

For a long time, Faro Furnell's cloudy eyes gazed thoughtfully at his reflection in the cracked mirror. Finally, by the light of a smoky lantern that weakly defied the darkening shadows of twilight, Furnell scraped at his stubble of beard with a dull razor. His hands shook for want of liquor to steady his tortured nerves. The dull blade pulled his skin and bluntly nicked his jaw in several places, but he wiped away the trickling blood and went doggedly on.

From under the straw tick mattress, he dragged a blue flannel shirt, faded by many scrubbings, a pair of clean overalls, and clean underwear and socks. He even bathed, after a fashion, with a bit of sponge and a bar of yellow laundry soap, the tin basin his only tub. Lastly, when he was garbed in fresh clothing, he parted his white hair with an aged, broken-toothed comb.

Again he gazed for a long time at his reflection in the cracked mirror. Tiny muscles in his body twitched spasmodically. When he attempted the construction of a cigaret, the paper split between his shaking fingers. Behind his blurred blue eyes burned a feverish glow that made them seem less dull.

His lips moved in an inaudible monologue as he knelt beside the cot and shoved a hand far under the mattress. When it came forth, it held a long-barreled Colt. Under the hammer of the gun was an empty shell. The inside of the barrel was pitted with tiny specks. For the gun had not been cleaned since that day, twenty years ago, when the bullet from that empty shell had taken the life of Jack Manton.

He shoved the gun into the waistband of his overalls and, blowing out the lantern, shuffled along a dark passageway to the lighted barroom.

A few loungers leaned against the bar listening to Turkey Track Tolliver, who was talking in a low tone. He ceased speaking when he saw Faro Furnell slump into a chair at an empty card table.

"Hey, there!" called Turkey Track heartily. "What's the idee in gittin' all duded up thataway, Faro, then goin' off in a corner, high-toned as a buck Injun in a plug hat? Belly up to the bar an' h'ist one. Here's two boys from the Bear Paw Pool outfit, squanderin' coin. Live 'uns, feller! Rattle yore dewclaws."

"I ain't drinkin', Turkey Track," said Furnell huskily.

"Now looky here, pardner," growled the saloon man, "don't go actin' the —— fool. A man that's drunk the licker you've bin drinkin' can't break off thataway without gittin' snakes er pink elephants er some such ailment. Ain't I tried it, myse'f? Lope up here an' swaller one."

"I ain't drinkin' no licker," came from Furnell stubbornly.

"Then I'm gonna fix yuh up what I calls a 'Gila Monster.' You kin gargle it er rub it on yore briskit. It's guaranteed tuh take the hide off any place she lights. A leetle mixture uh tobasco sauce, strychnine, rattlesnake pizen, an' mange cure. When she hits yore innards, yuh rear up an' fall over backward, then buck yore own hat off. Keerful yuh don't spill any on yore boots, fer she'll eat plumb through cowhide."

From various mysterious bottles, Turkey Track Tolliver mixed his Gila Monster. It filled a water tumbler.

"Now, one uh you boys fetch that bucket full uh water tuh put out the fire," grinned Tolliver as he rounded the end of the bar and made his way to Furnell's table. "I'm gonna git this soothin' syrup down ol' Faro if I have tuh hog-tie him."

"I tell yuh," persisted Furnell feebly, "I don't want no drink."

"It ain't what yuh want," grinned Tolliver. "It's what yo're gonna git. Now swaller." And he shoved the edge of the glass between Furnell's teeth. The victim coughed, choked, and swallowed.

The stuff burned his throat as he gulped it down, shaking hands pulling in feeble protest against Tolliver's stout grip on the glass. Tears welled to the drinker's eyes as the hot stuff warmed his stomach. His face reddened, but not until the glass was empty did Tolliver take it from Furnell's lips.

As an artist steps back to view a masterpiece, so did Turkey Track Tolliver view the sputtering man in the chair.

"If there's ary spotted giraffes, purple snakes, er green monkeys left alive in yore system," he chuckled, "I'll quit tendin' bar an' go sheep-herdin'. Yuh may die, Faro, but it won't be from D.Ts."

Whatever the terrible concoction contained, it had its effect. Faro Furnell's hands quit shaking and a warm glow spread through his body, bringing a faint flush to his cheeks.

Turkey Track did not urge him to join the men at the bar, nor did he betray the fact that he had noticed the gun in Faro Furnell's waistband. Save for an occasional covert look toward the derelict at the table, he paid him no further heed.

Furnell sat slumped in his chair, his eyes on the door, awaiting the return of Jack Manton's son.

A huge wall clock ticked off lengthy minutes. Half an hour passed. Then Turkey Track Tolliver again stepped from behind the bar and went over to the lone watcher's table.

But Furnell did not move. He was sleeping soundly. Again the saloon man stepped back a pace, surveying the man in the chair.

"Them Gila Monsters," he grinned at the Bear Paw cowpunchers, "is shore a great invention. One uh you boys take his feet an' we'll tote him off tuh bed."

Then, looking toward the darkness beyond the swinging doors, Tolliver raised his voice.

"You kin come on in now, boys. Faro's passed out fer a night's sleep. Did yuh see ary sign uh the yaller-eyed Injun?"

"Nary sign," came the reply, mingling with chiming spur rowels as three cowpunchers entered the room.

"He'p yoreselves to refreshments," Tolliver told them. "It's on the house."

He gently took the sleeping man's gun and his voice softened as he looked down into the face of its owner.

"He was all cleaned up, boys, an' heeled. Packin' a gun that's so danged rusty it takes both hands tuh cock 'er."

"How the —— did he expect tuh git a man with a gat like that?" asked a young cowpuncher.

"Faro was aimin'," said Tolliver slowly, "that Jack Manton's yaller-eyed son should do all the killin'. Figgered, I reckon, that it'd make up fer what he done twenty years ago. I'm hopin' he'll feel differ'nt about it when he wakes up in the mornin'."

"That there Gila Monster drink," announced a man who had been eye-witness to its potency, "is shore a daisy."

"Ain't she, though?" Turkey Track fairly beamed. "I learnt it off a bartender in Helena. He called it the Tin-Horn's Hole Card, and mixed 'er without the hot stuff. I kin see where it'd be right handy in case some gent books hisse'f a big poker winnin' an' lights out fer bed, winners. Stoppin' at the bar fer a night-cap, the barkeep fixes him up with one uh these Tin-Horn's Hole Cards an' he passes out afore he gits his second boot off. All mister gambler has tuh do is roll him fer his winnin's. This barkeep 'lowed it was more e-lite than usin' a gun. Claimed that since he'd invented this here drink, the percentage uh killin's had bin cut down somethin' scan'lous. Now jest git holt uh ol' Faro's feet an' we puts him tuh bed, *pronto*."

FOR many months it had been the habit of Faro Furnell to open up the Last Chance at six o'clock in the morning. When he awoke, sober-eyed and without his usual feeling of nausea and headache from the indiscretions of a previous night, he lay staring at the bare walls of his little room, piecing together bits of scattered thought, fashioning them into a complete picture. A picture that became the likeness of Jack Manton. He recalled shaving and putting on fresh clothing. He remembered Turkey Track's Gila Monster. Presently he crawled from his bunk and put on the clothes that Turkey Track had taken off him nearly twelve hours before. He noticed that his hands were steadier than usual. He even held one hand out in front of his eyes for quite a long time, studying it. Then he washed in cold water and, armed with a mop and bucket, walked thoughtfully into the barroom.

His being craved for its customary "mornin's mornin'" and it took every shred of will-power left in him to combat that desire for whisky.

Several times during his task of mopping up the place he paused, short of breath, his eyes fastening on the bottles that lined the back bar. But always he went back to his labors without taking the drink he so badly needed. He worked feverishly, head bent over his task, until his body was bathed in perspiration, although it was not yet sunrise and the air held the chill of night in it.

Presently he looked up, attracted by some slight sound near the doorway. There, standing with his long legs wide spread, thumbs hooked in the waistband of his overalls, stood Jack Manton.

Faro Furnell lay aside his bucket and mop, straightening to an upright position.

"Some gent taken my gun off me last night," he told Manton. "I wa'n't able tuh locate it this mornin'. Tolliver musta took the house gun home with him last night. Can't locate no weepon of any kind. Directly I've got me a shootin' iron, I'll be ra'rin' to accomodate yuh."

"Yeah?" Manton was eying him coldly. Into his yellow eyes there crept a look of cruel calculation. A quick glance about him assured him that the two were alone. A few quick strides and he was at Furnell's side.

Without warning, he slapped the older man in the face. Not hard enough to floor him, but with enough force to rock the white head and leave a red mark on the swamper's cheek. Again and again he slapped open-handed at the man who made no move to defend himself. And all the while he smiled.

"Now, you old bum, trot behind that bar and buy a drink," he sneered.

There was not even the compliment of anger in his tone. Merely contempt for a man who would not fight back. Still smiling twistedly, he watched Furnell obey meekly.

Jack Manton was "all Injun" just then. Bad Injun at that. His was the arrogance of the red warrior who, in breech-clout and feathers, taunts a white man who shows fear of him. He was too drunk with cruelty to read what was written in the eyes of Faro Furnell.

The white man's body was as shambling as ever, the shoulders sagged with a hopeless, prideless droop. His hands shook as they set out a glass and bottle of whisky. But some inner fire had cut the film that clouded his blue eyes and they shone like twin blue stars.

"Yesterday," said Jack Manton, leering across the bar into Furnell's face that was blotched red from his blows, "the skunk that runs this joint busted my glass like I was a buck nigger."

He tossed off his drink and shoved the empty glass across the bar.

"I'm wonderin' if you foller the rules of his house. I'm waitin', you white-livered bum, to see if you bust my glass."

"Supposin' I do?" faltered Furnell, his hand creeping toward the glass.

Manton, smiling faintly, his yellow eyes taunting the other man, gave no reply.

With a quick movement, Faro Furnell swept the little glass from the bar to the floor where it shattered with a musical tinkle.

Manton's long arm shot across the bar, lean fingers fastening to the old cowpuncher's open shirt collar. His other arm swung a hard fist full into Furnell's face with such force that it tore the shirt and let the old fellow's limp body slide to the floor.

He had to stand on the bar-rail and lean far over to see the extent of damage done by the blow. He saw the face of the older man, white save for the red blotches, a thin trickle of blood threading from a corner of the mouth and dripping on to the floor.

"Git up," he snapped. Furnell obeyed dazedly.

"Now set out another glass." Again the old cowpuncher obeyed, moving painfully, for the fall had jarred him.

Once more Jack Manton drank alone, then shoved the glass toward the white-lipped Furnell.

"Still feel lucky?" he sneered.

"Lucky?" Furnell's voice shook with emotion as his fingers closed over the glass. "*Lucky?*"

With a quick move he hurled the glass squarely into Manton's face.

Like a man in a trance he saw blood spurt from Manton's gashed lip, saw the dark face twist with hate, and then he went down in a heap, the tinkle of shattered glass dimly echoing as he lost consciousness. Manton's blow had come so swiftly that he had not even seen it.

The splash of cold water in his face brought him back to consciousness. He opened his eyes to look into the set face of Turkey Track Tolliver.

"Easy, ol' hoss, take 'er easy," came Turkey Track's voice, its customary drawl shaken by some emotion. "Don't try tuh git on yore laigs till yuh feel snuffy enough tuh paw dirt in that jasper's yaller eyes. Yuh'll feel better, directly."

Faro Furnell shook off Turkey Track's restraining hand and got slowly to his feet, pulling a shirt sleeve across his bruised mouth.

"Where'd he go, Turkey Track?"

"Never you mind, ol'-timer, where that polecat went to. He's outa sight, anyhow. Wipe that blood off yore mouth with this apron. That's it. Feel some better? Kinda groggy, eh? How about a little shot uh red-eye to kinda stiffen up yore whiskers?"

Furnell shook his head.

"I ain't drinkin', Turkey Track. Reckon I'll quit botherin' the stuff an' stay sober a spell. An' listen, pard—"

"Yeah?"

"Don't—don't say nothin' to the boys about—about what happened this mornin'."

"——, no. I ain't no dang parrot. As fer that yaller-eyed—"

"Please, Turkey Track," Furnell cut in, "let him alone. This is my scrap, pard. I know I ain't much of a man, but I gotta play this hand out alone. Jest *gotta!*"

His voice cracked but Tolliver pretended not to notice.

"It's him an' me fer it, can't yuh understand, Turkey Track?"

"And you packin' a —— gun that's so rusty it won't shoot?"

"Keep the gun." Faro's voice became steadier. "I'll make out fer a spell without a gun. Kin yuh loan me the use uh that sorrel hoss uh yourn?"

"Sorrel Jimmy?" Turkey Track could not keep the tone of surprize from his voice, for it had been many long months since Faro Furnell had ridden a horse.

"Yeah. I'd kinda like the feel of a hoss between my laigs onct more. It'd make me feel more like—like a man, mebbe."

"The fat rascal needs ridin'," growled Turkey Track, pouring himself a drink. "Ride the tail offen him, pardner. Yore hull is hangin' somewhere around my woodshed. When I go tuh breakfast I'll have the missus dig it up an' send one uh the kids over to the barn with it. It'll save changin' the stirrups on my saddle."

He did not add that it had been his secret hope that some day Faro Furnell would be wanting his saddle again. From across the open fires of a thousand round-up and trail camps, Turkey Track Tolliver had studied men. Of late years he had read their eyes across a liquor-stained bar. Thus ably schooled in the vagaries of mankind, he saw beyond the eyes and into the heart of Faro Furnell, and had the good sense not to mention his findings.

"If I was you, I'd pull out afore the sun got too hot. The Pool wagon's workin' over on Bean Crick. Why don't yuh mosey over that way an' put in a day er two pokin' aroun' showin' them mail-order kids how we usta do it? Huh?"

"Mebbe. Most mebbe I'll be back about sundown. I'm shore obliged, Turkey Track, fer—"

"Go tuh ——, yuh wind-broke, cow-hocked, box-ankled son of a side-hill gouger. Lope over to the Chink's an' git outside of some ham an' aigs. Then keep goin' till yuh git to the Pool camp. Don't show yore face in here er I'll shoot yuh. Drag it, yuh warthog."

And he poured himself another drink as he watched Faro Furnell go across the street.

"Walkin' like yuh aimed tuh git somewhere, ol'-timer," he chuckled. "—— if I know what's millin' in yore head, but I'm tellin' the plain an' fancy trade, beer customers an' wine buyers, that I'm for yuh. I'm keepin' that Manton Injun on ice fer yuh, to boot. Here's mud in yore eye, Faro."

Though a trifle rheumatic, Turkey Track Tolliver was not clumsy. Moreover he was big, and solid despite easy living. He now walked back to a card room and unlocked the door. It was a dark little room, green blinds pulled down across the two small windows. For a moment he stood there, eyes blinking till they focused to the dim light. Then he stepped inside and stooped over a huddled form that lay on the floor. Striking a match, he looked intently into the face of Jack Manton. There was quite a lump on the side of the unconscious man's jaw. When the match went out, Tolliver jerked up the green window-shade and then closed the door. Manton's form twitched, then the yellow eyes blinked open. Tolliver grinned and rubbed the skinned knuckles of his left hand.

"I only hit yuh onct, Injun," he drawled. "If I'd a follered it up with a second swing, we'd uh had tuh plant yuh. How do yuh like it out West, as far as yuh bin?"

Manton's hand crept covertly toward the waistband of his overalls and Tolliver's grin became wider.

"Oh, yuh still got yore gun, yaller eyes," he said easily. "And whenever yuh feel like the sign is right, drag 'er out in the light. But unless I'm gittin' old an' absent-minded, I'd say yuh ain't got the guts tuh face a man that's got anywheres near a even break. I knowed yore daddy an' knowed him fer a bushwhackin', low-down coward. He killed some men in his day, did Jack Manton, but he hand-picked his victims. He knowed he had a cinch every time he pressed a scrap. He'd bin hittin' a bottle that mornin' him an' Faro Furnell tangled over that dun hoss. Had it with him on last guard that mornin', fer I had a drink out of it. He was jest drunk enough tuh make a purty ride, which he did. No man ever rid better. Then, when it come to him that he'd busted the big Dun, it made him drunk. All the snake in him come to the surface. More'n one Circle C man went sick to his stummick when we seen what he'd done tuh that hoss.

"Because Faro Furnell was the cleanest, squarest boy that ever run a round-up wagon, Jack Manton hated him. He'd taken Faro's good-natured ways fer somethin' else. Because he didn't bully his men, Manton figgered him as bein' yaller. An' he thought he had the bulge when he jerked his gun. But he had Faro figgered all wrong. He died fer his mistake.

"Now you show up here with a dun-colored hoss an' yore yaller eyes an' yore nasty grin. I don't know what yore game is, Injun. Ner I don't much give a ——. I know yore breed like a book. Yo're a sneakin', bulldozin', yaller-backed skunk, Manton, playin' what yuh think tuh be a cinch. Su'prized yuh, didn't I, when I showed up after yuh'd knocked out ol' Faro? Well, that ain't a sample tuh what's comin'. You kin keep yore gun. Pack it aroun' in yore hand if you've a mind to. But the fust time yuh cock that gun, yo're a shore dead corpse."

In the make-up of Jack Manton was a streak of cowardice. Turkey Track Tolliver now brought it to the surface. Like many another big man who does not know the meaning of fear, he held Manton in contempt. He talked for many minutes and before he finished he had called Jack Manton every fighting name in his well-stocked vocabulary.

And all the while Jack Manton sat half-crouched on the floor, his thin mouth twitching, his yellow eyes red with smoldering hatred. When Tolliver jerked him to his feet and propelled him out into the barroom, Manton visibly shook with the intensity of that hatred. Tolliver, seeing that terrible rage, blew softly on his skinned knuckles and laughed at him. He should have remembered that it is bad luck to laugh at a man in whose veins runs the blood of Apache Indians.

NOW, I have rode fer money
And I have rode fer fun,
But the ——edest ride I ever took
Was on a hoss called Dun.

'Twas in the spring of '91
Furnell he run the spread
Till him an' Jack Manton tangled
An' Furnell shot him dead.

The man who sang the song was a beardless youth who rode at a brisk walk around the Bear Paw Pool day herd. He sang full-throatedly, a care-free lilt to the notes that drifted on the soft morning breeze toward the lone rider who came along the trail from Chinook.

Many a cow country happening, put into crude rhyme and fitted to the dirge-like tune of some ballad, is thus passed on to the coming generation of cowboys who gradually fill the gaps left by the old-timers who pass on to the Big Range. Thus the tale of outlaw men and outlaw horse is handed on and on from the Canadian line to the Rio Grande. Deeds of daring, passed on by wandering troubadours whose only home is the open range, with the low-hung stars the big roof that covers the entire clan.

Into these songs creeps the drip of rain on yellow slickers, the lonesome bawl of a stray cow, the roaring death of the dread stampede, the crack of a .45. The rhyming is crude, the tune sprinkled with minor-keyed sadness, but into the rough-hewn words is blended the smell of sage and the color of the sunset.

Grazing cattle dotted the sun-bathed hills, white tents marked the round-up camp, a dust cloud beyond told of cattle being worked. The blurred sound of their bawling was fit accompaniment to the song of the young cowboy on day herd.

And humped in his saddle, Faro Furnell listened with the morning sun shining into his blue eyes.

He had heard a drunken cowpuncher sing the "Circle C Dun" one night in the Last Chance. He had crawled off into the night, hot tears trickling across his unshaven jaw, the words following him, taunting him, reminding him of the man he had once been. Now they came across the sunny hills to him once more.

Oh, Faro was a top hand,
As all you cowboys know
And Manton was a low-down skunk
To treat the Dun hoss so.

"Now fill yore hand!" cried Faro,
Whose game is on the square,
And Manton's soul went yonderly
To the Big Range Over There.

Faro Furnell rode on toward the camp under the cottonwoods, leaving the young cowboy and his song behind. The feel of the horse under him, the warmth of a kindly sun, the familiar sights and sounds of the round-up, were doing for him what whisky could never do. He read the brands on the cattle he passed. Old brands. Irons that carried history and tradition. Men had starved and faced blizzards and fought big odds to carry the honor of those irons. For forty a month and grub, men had risked their lives to save the cattle belonging to their outfit. It had taken men, real men, to hold a job during the early days in the Montana cow country. Men who were made of rawhide and barbed wire. And he, Faro Furnell, had once captained a crew of such cowhands. By hard work and fearless judgment, he had risen from the ranks. Then he had broken like a rope with a rotten strand hidden somewhere in its rawhide length.

"Faro was a top hand."— *"His game was on the square."*— Bits of the song threaded into his musings. Perhaps it was the sun that made his eyes smart. Man can't stand too much sun when he ain't used to it. No, 'twasn't the sun, neither. Just that chicken heart inside that weakens. —— of a way to be actin'. Blubberin' like a kid. Chicken-hearted, that was what. Gittin' worse, too. Feelin' sorry fer hiss'f. Him a growed-up man, to boot.

He felt of his bruised mouth where Jack Manton's yellow-eyed son had struck him. Then he remembered why he had ridden out of town. He pulled a shirt sleeve across his eyes with an abrupt movement and his teeth snapped shut.

"Strike me stone blind an' sew my eyewinkers shut if it ain't ol' Faro Furnell!"

Thus a grizzled veteran of Dutch ovens and sourdough bread greeted him. For the first time in many months, Faro grinned.

"Turn yore cayuse loose, yuh dadgummed ol' moss horn. The jingler'll pick him up an' turn him into the remuda. Yo're a sight fer weak eyes, Faro. Light, feller, light. Directly this son-of-a-gun-in-the-sack gits done, an' this roast gits a mite browner, we'll git the wrinkles outa yore belly. How's ol' Turkey Track?"

The cook's gaze strayed to a bit of brown glass that bulged from a hole in the yellow slicker behind Faro's saddle. Faro jerked the saddle from his horse, pulled off the bridle, and with a friendly slap across the sweaty rump, gave Sorrel Jimmy his freedom. Then he untied the slicker.

"Turkey Track sent out a dram fer you boys," announced Faro. "Hit 'er light, fer I only brung one quart. A drink apiece fer all hands."

With due solemnity the cook drew the cork, passed a floury palm across the mouth of the bottle, and handed it toward Faro. But Faro shook his head.

"Off the stuff fer a spell," he explained, "Drink hearty."

"Hmmmmmmmm." The cook swallowed some jocular remark as he looked into Faro's blue eyes. *"Hmmmmmmm.* Well, feller, here's how!"

And when he had corked the bottle and given it a position of honor and prominence on the rawhide-covered mess table, he waved his guest to a seat on his bedroll.

"Lingerin' a spell, Faro?"

"No-o-o-o-o-o-o. Make 'er back tuh town this evenin', I reckon."

"The ol' man cud use a good beef man."

News had gotten to the Bear Paw Pool wagon regarding the appearance of a man who claimed to be the son of Jack Manton. Only that morning, over tin cups of hot coffee, the punchers had discussed this new Jack Manton. In the chill hour of dawn the cook heard them describe the man with the yellow eyes, and the working of Turkey Track Tolliver's Gila Monster. Range gossip is scarce, and it had been a choice morsel that the boys brought back from town.

Now, as Faro poured himself a cup of black coffee, the old cook wondered if Jack Manton's son had driven old Faro out of town. Perhaps Furnell guessed what went on in the mind of the round-up cook for he smiled oddly as he blew the steaming coffee into faint ripples, furthering the process of its cooling.

But he made no mention of this son of Jack Manton's and the cook was too old a hand to voice a question.

They talked of everything else under the sun. Presently there came the thud of hoofs, voices, careless laughter, and the jingle of spurs. The men were in for dinner. The cook shoved a head from the tent door.

"Come an' git it, er I th'ow it away!"

They came. A dusty, good-natured lot, reeking with the odor of horse sweat and exchanging banter of incidents that had come up during the morning's drive. A slow, drawling, even-toned jumble of conversation sprinkled with mild profanity.

"I don't mind a hoss," some cowpuncher was saying, "that'll bow up on a man of a mornin', hog acrost the flats, then act like a honest tuh gosh cow pony the rest uh the day. But that there Ginger Snap waits till a man's quit ridin' tight. When that steer broke back from the cut, I gigs ol' Ginger Snap pony, aimin' tuh head mister steer. I loses my right stirrup the fust jump, my hat the second, and when that pony lands spread out like a week's washin' that third jump, he jest nacherally gits hisse'f a cowboy."

"An' what does the ol' man say?"

"Well, I'm kinda occupied with my mind set on derobin' myse'f outa some prickly-pear cactus which I set on after my deeparture from my hull which is goin' toward the Canadian border on top ol' Ginger Snap. I'm diggin' myself outa the cactus with my Barlow knife when up comes the boss.

" 'Son,' says the dad-burned ol' son of a gun, rollin' of his off eye like a bronc, 'you'll spoil that hoss, lettin' him run off thataway. What's the idee in lettin' him stampede off through the herd, spoilin' a mornin's work. When yuh git tuh camp, ketch out suthin' that's woman-broke an' go on out to the day herd. Since yo're so —— set on layin roun' on the ground, a week uh day herdin' orter ketch yuh up on round-sidin'.' "

"Kinda ringy, wa'n't he?"

"Had a horn drooped an' no mistake. The next time I hire out to a outfit, I'm gonna ask some pers'nal questions regardin' the early mornin' habits uh the gent that's roddin' the lay. If he's one uh these ol' varmints that makes out breakfast on a cup uh coffee an' a cigareet, I'm gonna keep a-movin'."

"Forty-mile circles," added another voice amid the splashing and snorting that betrayed the fact that the speaker was washing up. "An' a man needs two relays uh stout hosses to bring in a drive uh these know-nothin' doggies to the hold-up ground. I got three half-broke knot-headed broncs in my string. All of 'em contest hosses that'd bother a bronc-peeler tuh set when they break in two. Long circles, mean hosses an' bad water makes a man older'n ——."

"Swap yore bedroll fer a lantern,
Trade yore top hoss fer a mule,
You'll never put on taller workin'
Fer the Bear Paw Cattle Pool."

The singer, a giant of a man with mud colored hair and sunny blue eyes, kicked off a pair of service-scarred angora chaps and grinned widely. This was Tom McDonald, the "old man" of the Pool outfit.

He quit singing as he stepped into the mess tent and saw Faro sitting on the cook's bed.

"H'are yuh, Faro? Hear them roarin', bellyachin' mail-order young'ns a-bellerin' out yonder? Reminds me of a li'l' ol' wind-bellied bull I onct seen. No bigger'n a pint uh beer, harmless as a sheep, but bawlin' an' pawin' of dirt like he was growed up. A man's gotta either knock 'em between the horns with a brandin' iron er else pay no never mind to 'em. How's tricks, Faro?"

"So-so, Tom. Gatherin' much stuff?"

"Not half as much as I'd orter," he spoke, looking meaningly at the cowpunchers who were straggling into the tent. "A man can't do much with a crew uh hay shovelers. Gimme one good honest tuh Gawd cow-hand an' I'd fire this whole lot uh wind-jammin', round-sidin' excuses fer cowboys."

Faro grinned. He knew most of the crew and knew them to be as fine a lot of cowpunchers as you could find in a day's ride. This was Tom's way of showing his affection. Likewise he was covering up his surprize at seeing Faro Furnell and was making a rough attempt to put the old wagon-boss at ease.

Tom had seen and recognized that saddle that lay alongside the rope corral. The name "Faro" was stamped behind the cantle. And as the men unsaddled, he gave them orders in an undertone to avoid all mention of Jack Manton. The Pool men had gamely risen to the occasion, taking advantage of the opportunity to "hooraw" their boss who gave them as good as they sent.

It worked. Faro, before the noonday meal was over, slipped back into his old environment and found himself part of the outfit. The one drink apiece from his bottle had helped limber the barely noticeable restraint they all felt in the presence of this man whose tragic story had become an oft-repeated camp-fire yarn.

After the brief noonday rest, Tom pinched out the coal of his after-dinner smoke and rose.

"Ketch out ol' Cotton Eye, Faro, an' come on out with us," came Tom's careless invitation. "I kin shore use a extra hand. Got a mess uh calves tuh brand."

"Don't care if I do," Faro accepted. "Don' aim tuh start back fer town till evenin' noway. Yuh still got Cotton Eye in yore string?"

"I'll tell a man! Twenty-three years old an' the best rope hoss in the outfit. Hog fat, too."

"Twenty-three years old," repeated Faro. "Time shore passes, as the feller says, an' yuh can't git away from it. Cotton Eye was a jughead bronc, Tom, when I quit punchin' cows."

There was but few years' difference in the ages of the two men, yet Tom looked twenty years younger than Faro Furnell.

"We're gittin' rings aroun' our horns, shore enough," grinned Tom. "About the first snow, when the rheumatism creeps into a man's bones an' he wonders where he's spent his summer wages, I shore feel ancient. That's what a man gits fer stayin' in a country where she's nine months winter and three months late in the fall. Pickin' up falls in badger holes, leavin' yore slicker in the bed wagon of a rainy day, forkin' mean hosses, an' gittin' knocked down an' tromped on by ornery cows. You was wise tuh draw outa the game when yuh did, Faro. I bin thinkin' uh takin' a winter's job in town myse'f."

He did not give Faro a chance to reply, but led the way to the rope corral that was full of milling horses.

Nobody apparently saw Faro miss three throws before he managed to drop his rope on Cotton Eye. Time had been when Faro Furnell was the best corral roper and calf heeler in the country.

Cotton Eye, fat and feeling many years younger than his actual age, humped and grunted as Faro jerked the latigo tight. When Faro swung stiffly into the saddle, the old cow pony crow-hopped a few times out of sheer exuberance. Tom and his men pretended that they did not see Faro "pull leather." In a loosely bunched crowd they loped over the hills toward the hold-up of cows and calves.

"I'd be proud tuh have yuh do the loopin'," spoke the wagon-boss. Tom had, in thus inviting Faro to rope out the calves, paid homage to the skill of his guest. It is no trivial honor to be asked to rope calves when you are the guest at a round-up. Tom did his utmost to make his tone sincere. Faro, glancing at him sharply, flushed. But Tom ignored the other man's embarrassment. He knew Faro would not accept the offer, yet he went on as if he were taking acceptance for granted. As if he were talking to the Faro Furnell of twenty years ago.

"Better ketch out jest the Pool stuff an' let me 'tend to the strays. I bin lettin' the reps from the Square an' Circle Diamond an' Circle C do their own ropin'. There's two-three more stray-men workin' with us, too. Tuh save janglin', I let 'em snare their own stuff. Takes longer but makes 'em feel better about it. There's a white face Bar R cow in there with her left horn sawed. Watch fer her calf. Want tuh save it fer a bull. It's one uh them thoroughbreds that was shipped from Helena. Keep yore eye peeled fer a spotted cow with a 76 barred out. One uh the boys 'lowed she was in their drive this mornin', an' got cut into the hold-up. She goes into the day herd, directly we've—"

"Hold on, yuh gosh darned magpie." Faro was no longer flushing and an easy grin widened his mouth. "I ain't gonna make a —— fool outa myse'f tryin' tuh heel calves. I'm rusty an' you know it. I'll 'tend fire er tally er hold up the herd, but I ain't ropin' no calves. You boys seen me grab fer hand holts when ol' Cotton Eye hogged off a jump er two. Yuh made out not tuh see. Yuh know —— well that I couldn't make a hand nowhere except on day herd, Tom McDonald! Yuh ain't asked me what I was doin' out here ner why I quit town when Jack Manton's young 'un showed up. Yuh ain't done nothin' but act like a white man, Tom, an' I'm thankin' yuh fer it. God's give me some mighty good friends. I'm aimin' now tuh play the game out like a man orter."

Unconsciously, he passed his hand across his bruised mouth.

"Shore thing," mumbled Tom embarrassedly. "—— yes. Yo're danged tootin'. Yeah, you bet. Uh-huh. Gimme the loan of a match, Faro, then lope over to where that long-geared jasper on the white pony is augerin' with that speckled-faced Long X rep. Tell 'em I said the reps'd brand out their stuff first. Then come back an' do the brandin'. Reckon you kin still stamp a hot iron on a critter, yuh hide-hound, high-headed ol' renegade."

And he rode off singing "The Circle C Dun" just to show Faro Furnell that he would not further wound him with pity.

BIT by bit, like a prospector picking up scattered nuggets of gold that have been strewn by him in some moment of delirium, Faro Furnell gathered the particles of an old life.

Trickles of sweat slipped from under his hat brim and made crooked rivulets in the dust that powdered his face. Cattle bawled, singed hair from fresh brands stung his nostrils, calf "rasslers" flung bantering talk to and fro. Ropers dragged calves to the fire from the herd, followed by the cow who, alarmed by the startled bawling of its young, forgot its fear of men to protect its offspring.

Faro and Tom did the branding, another man marked ears into crops and swallowforks and underbits and jinglebobs. Horses stood about, range-tied by the mere formality of trailing bridle reins. One bronc was snubbed by its hackamore rope to the saddle horn of a gentle horse who grazed unconcernedly. Chaps and spurs, discarded by the men who "flanked" the calves, hung from the empty saddles.

Trip after trip between the cow-chip fire and innumerable calves held by weary "rasslers," and still Faro was showing no outward sign of fatigue. Now and then, during a lull, he drank from the water bucket and mopped his flushed face.

"Better lay off awhile," suggested Tom. "Sun's mighty hot on a man that ain't used to it."

"Hired out fer a tough hand," grinned Faro, "and I'm playin' my string out."

Those unused muscles were aching from unaccustomed work, his heart pounded under his ribs like a trip-hammer, but Faro was happy. Not even Tom guessed the extent of relief that came with the branding of the last calf.

As the cowpunchers drifted across the ridge in the wake of the herd, Tom and Faro rode toward camp, dragging cooling branding irons at the end of their ropes. The shadows of sundown were already creeping into the coulees. Beyond the riders, a coyote stood skylighted, then loped away, hidden in the sagebrush.

"It's bin a shore fine day, Tom," Faro broke the silence. "Dunno when I've felt so good."

"Bet yo're tuckered out."

"Not by a —— sight," lied Faro. "I'm good fer a fifty mile ride right now."

"A few weeks 'ud harden yuh onct more, Faro. Better stay on with us. I'm short-handed an' kin shore use yuh."

"Wisht I could take yuh up on that, Tom. I need tuh git the licker outa my system. But I got a deal on in town."

"Don't play the —— fool, feller. Lettin' that Injun kill yuh ain't goin' tuh he'p none." Tom was coming to the point now without quibbling. "You bin a —— fool fer twenty years, pardner. There has bin times when yuh shore bent men's friendships to the bustin' point. Yuh ain't bin square with us boys that's stuck by yuh. Turkey Track an' the rest of us that's kept our mouths shet an' let yuh go tuh —— like yuh've done. Now here comes this new Jack Manton. From what the boys says he's as ornery as the other 'un. I hear yuh was fixin' to let that 'breed shoot yuh. Mebbe the boys had it wrong?"

"No," admitted Faro. "They was right. It was like seein' a ghost come back to gather in my scalp, Tom. It got to me, some way. Had me spooky. But this mornin' suthin' happened to kinda change my way uh thinkin'. I seen jest how much of a snake this gent is. The same kind uh snake Jack Manton was the mornin' I shot him, twenty years ago. I learnt, this mornin', that the man I killed was jest a rattler that needed killin'. I rid out here to kinda think 'er all out an' git a tail holt on myse'f. I taken twenty years outa my life an' drug it as low as a man kin. I bin lower'n a —— sheep-herdin' greaser, Tom. Yo're right. I've shore rid rough-shod on you boys. I'm goin' back to town this evenin' an' call this Manton jasper's bluff. He may git me but I'm gittin' a mouthful while he gits his meal."

"Now," grinned Tom, "yo're actin' like ol' Faro Furnell. Got a gun?"

"I ain't. Ner I don't need a gun. I killed one man an' that's a-plenty. I'm givin' this Manton snake his odds, savvy?"

"An' he'll gut-shoot yuh," growled Tom. "Quit actin' like a danged Sunday-school perfesser. That gent has it on yuh fer build, age, an' speed. If ever a man was in bad need of a equalizer, it's you."

Tom pulled a Colt from his chaps pocket and held it out butt first.

"She's a honest gun, pardner. Take it. If yore two-bit conscience is gallin' yore withers, shoot low at him. Bust both laigs an' arms, say. Er knock his ears off. Then tell him what's on yore mind. You gotta work that feller down to yore size, *hombre*, before you kin win ary fight. Then carve yore brand on his briskit, cut yore hoggin' string, an' turn him loose."

He shoved the gun into Faro's hand. Faro nodded and dropped the weapon into the pocket of his chaps.

They found a visitor at camp. A big, grim-lipped man with a sheriff's badge pinned to his unbuttoned vest.

"Jest waitin' for you, Tom," he said. "My horse went lame. How's chances to borrow a stout road horse?"

"Plumb good, Sheriff."

Tom did not ask the sheriff's business. That would be an impertinent breach of etiquette. Moreover, there were times when a sheriff hunted some man who had friends in a cow outfit. To save some cowpuncher the embarrassment of a lie, a peace officer would remain silent regarding the man he hunted.

"The wrangler's comin' in with the remuda now," said Tom. "You know ol' Faro, here, don't yuh?"

"I bin in his jail a few times," said Faro quickly, a trifle red under the cold scrutiny of the sheriff, whose manner toward him was one of cold contempt.

"Yeah, I know Furnell. What you doin' out here, anyhow?"

"Gittin' a whiff uh fresh air. Goin' back to town quick as I change hosses."

"Yeah? Well, it's safe enough for you now, in Chinook."

"Meanin' jest what, Sheriff?" asked Faro.

"Meaning, Furnell, that Jack Manton has high-tailed it. Too bad it wasn't *you* he murdered afore he went."

"What in —— you drivin' at, Sheriff?" snapped Tom McDonald. "What's the idee in rawhidin' Faro, anyhow?"

"Don't, Tom," said Faro. "I don't need nobody to take my part."

"No?" The sheriff's tone was heavy with sarcasm. "You shore stepped out from under the big load this mornin', my friend. This Manton 'breed throwed a scare into you and you left Turkey Track Tolliver to take up yore scrap. Which he did. He put the fear in the 'breed all right. Then Manton slipped in by the back door and shot Turkey Track in the back."

"God! Yo're—is that the truth, Sheriff?" rasped Faro.

"I ain't in the habit of lyin'. I'm after Manton right now."

"Turkey Track is dead?"

"Dyin' when I pulled out." The sheriff turned his back on Faro and walked toward the corral.

"——, Faro," said Tom, as Faro, white-lipped and dull-eyed, stood like one in a trance. "Don't take it like—"

Faro shook off Tom's hand.

"Don't, Tom. Fer Gawd's sake, don't. The sheriff's right. I shoulda knowed ol' Turkey Track 'ud jump Manton. He's right. I'm a —— yaller quitter. A weaklin'."

He swung to face the Pool boss.

"Tom, I want a hoss. One that'll outtravel the one the sheriff forks. I seen a rider not more'n two hours ago, ridin' hard. Thought then it was a Pool man. But I'm layin' a bet it was Manton. Tom, I know yuh think I'm a —— coward, but gimme this one chanct, won't yuh?"

"Will I? Will I, yuh darned ol' badger? I'll do better'n that. I'll give mister sheriff a hoss that'll go lame on him afore he's gone ten mile. Faro, ol'-timer, it's you an' this Jack Manton for it. Remember now, do yore shootin' first an' yore augerin' later on."

"It's white uh you tuh—"

"Dry up, yuh dang tadpole. Git into that tent an' fill up on grub an' coffee. I'll have yore hoss ketched an' saddled afore that slow motion sheriff kin build a loop in his ketch rope. All I ask is the scalp uh this Manton wolf tuh hang on the Pool tentpole. Shake yore hoofs, yuh blaze-faced son of a t'rant'lar. You was braggin' about a fifty mile ride. Yuh got yore wish. By the time yuh git back, yuh orter be purty well warped aroun' into saddle shape."

EVERY muscle in Faro Furnell's body cried out for rest. His nerves were pulled to the breaking point. Because the harmful breaking down of a splendid body had taken twenty years in its accomplishment, that harm could not be undone between sunrise and dark. Faro was paying heavily, but with a grim fortitude that bordered on heroism.

Dusk, then night, found him riding steadily on, standing in his stirrups as his horse kept on at a long-legged trot, the road gait of the horseman who knows horses and his country. The chill air, creeping through sweat-soaked clothes, made him shiver and ache. Joints stiffened, muscles cramped into painful knots that twisted the rider's face into distortions. His mind swam with a hundred torturing regrets and self-accusations. They pounded at his sanity, driving him on, numbing his physical pain in their insistent torture. Sometimes he cursed himself and Jack Manton and Manton's son. Cursed in broken, husky sentences that seemed to blurt out of their own accord. Later, when the moon came up and its soft silver light spread over the hills, he quit cursing and rode on in silence.

"God!" he croaked once. "God, can't yuh lend me a hand? Jest till I ketch up with him? From there on, I kin manage."

From his knowledge of the country and the way of a man who rides burdened with crime, he mentally mapped out the course that Manton would be most likely to follow in his flight. The trail led south toward the bad-lands along the Missouri River to the ford at the mouth of Bull Creek. A trail that sometimes was but the faint tracing of cow tracks, sometimes a deep-rutted road where round-up wagons had sunk hub-deep in sticky adobe during wet weather. Bald ridges, brush-filled coulees, stretches of sage-brush-dotted flats with bald spots of white alkali that showed like silver lakes in the moonlight. Now and then a creek, flanked by tall cottonwoods, willows, and box-elders.

Under the brim of his battered hat, Faro's bloodshot eyes peered across the country ahead, straining their vision for the moving blot that would be Jack Manton. Time after time he was fooled by stray horses that loomed up ahead, then with a startled snort, faded into the shadows. Each time Faro's fingers unwrapped themselves from the butt of the gun Tom had given him, he tasted the bitterness of disappointment. A little more weary each time, he choked back his disappointment and spurred his horse onward.

At a sandy crossing he picked up fresh signs that revived his courage. A man had dismounted there to drink. Boot heels dented the sandy bank. An empty whisky flask glittered in the moonlight. Where the tracks left the creek on the other side, the water was still a trifle muddy. Whoever had ridden that horse was not more than half an hour ahead of him.

"Hittin' the licker, too." Faro nodded to himself. "It'll make him ornery. He'll shoot. He killed Turkey Track. He'll kill me if he gits a chanct— If he gits the chanct."

He rode Tom McDonald's top circle-horse. A big, rangy bay animal that covered ground in long, swinging strides without turning a hair. A horse whose honest heart had never been abused, he traveled against the bit and gave eagerly of his splendid strength. Faro let the horse choose his gait and gripped his gun. Tired as he was, his muscles tingled with the thrill of his man hunt. The danger of it cleared his brain and drove the pain from his racked body. Gravel crunched and spattered into the brush under the shod hoofs of his horse. That sound and the creak of saddle leather were the only sounds that broke the silence of the night.

He topped a ridge, was skylighted for a moment, then dropped into a long draw that narrowed to a brush-spotted dry creek bed, filled with black shadows. Out of the shadows came a sound that pulled Faro up short. The nicker of a horse.

Even before the horse under him had slid to a halt at the edge of the brush, Faro flung himself from the saddle. As his boots hit the uneven ground he lost his balance, stumbled forward, then tripped and fell. The fall catching him unawares, he lost his gun in the effort to check the force of it with his hands.

A shot ripped the shadows with orange flame, echoing and re-echoing as the desperate Faro groped for his gun. That bullet had missed him by a scant twelve inches. His horse, startled and frightened by the belching flame, wheeled and bolted down the draw, reins dragging.

Another roar, not thirty feet from where Faro, crawling on hands and knees, searched for his .45. Something hot seared the flesh on his shoulder. He sprawled forward on his face and lay motionless. Something hard lay under his ribs. He wondered if that hard object were his gun. Yet he dared not risk moving to find out. His eyes fixed on the black brush from which spot the shot had come, he waited, trying to breathe slowly. His body went tense as he lay there, hoping that Manton would not shoot again. He knew that the yellow eyes were watching him and that one little move would bring a lead slug tearing and ripping its way into his flesh.

Fear gripped him. A shuddering, horrible fear of pain. He fought back the almost overpowering impulse to leap to his feet and run. His whole body seemed to go numb with that fear. His limbs seemed like leaden weights hung to his trunk. He wanted to shriek but knew that all power of speech had left him. It was as if he were suddenly stricken with paralysis. It was the nicker of Manton's horse that drove the panic from his heart. That commonplace sound brought him back from the nightmare of fear and he lay there to play out his hazardous game. A hundred yards away Faro's horse gave an answering nicker.

A faint sound from the brush. Something heavy crashed against his back. Manton, short on cartridges, was heaving rocks at the man who lay there, to test signs of life in the motionless form.

Faro shut his lips in a tight line to suppress a groan of pain as the rock struck him. Another rock struck him with a sickening thud, sending terrible pains along his spine. It took every shred of his will power to keep from flinching. Another rock. Then, after a moment that to Faro seemed an hour, Jack Manton stepped quickly from the brush, a Colt swinging in his hand. Manton stepped across his body and out of Faro's limited vision.

"Git up!" came Manton's husky command, followed by a kick that seemed to crush Faro's ribs. But the man on the ground neither groaned nor spoke.

"You, eh?" He heard Manton's voice again. "You, eh?"

A knee, bearing the man's weight, was on Faro's back, crushing him. The shadow of an upraised arm passed across Faro's narrowed eyes.

With what strength he could muster, Faro snapped his head back just as Manton's gun barrel struck the ground where his head had been a split-second before. Out went Faro's two hands, gripping the wrist, jerking the younger man off balance. His teeth sank to the bone in the man's gun hand. As Manton jerked away and on to his feet, Faro covered him with his own gun.

"Reach fer sky!" barked Faro hoarsely, "er I'll kill yuh!"

Jack Manton's hands, one of them streaming with blood, lifted slowly.

"One funny move outa you," warned Faro, "an' I'll bust both yore arms. I'm takin' you back tuh hang."

Manton's yellow eyes glittered, shifting like the eyes of a trapped wildcat. Each time their gaze flickered to a shining bit of metal at Faro's feet. Tom McDonald's gun that had been jolted from the old cowpuncher's hand. Faro saw the shifting eyes and his boot toe touched the gun. He grinned into the set face of the trapped man.

"I'll bust both yore arms, Manton, if you make a move fer that gun. Then, jest to show yuh my heart's in the right place, yuh bushwhackin' son of a yaller-hided hoss-killer, I'd earmark yuh."

And when Faro Furnell, his blazing blue eyes never leaving Manton's face, stooped and filled his left hand with the six-shooter that lay on the ground, the man with the yellow eyes did not move.

MEN made of barbed wire and rawhide are hard to kill. Chinook's doctor told Turkey Track Tolliver that he reckoned the only way the town would ever get rid of him was to build a gallows. Turkey Track, propped up against snowy pillows, grinned at the physician through the blue smoke of his cigaret and asked concerning the whereabouts of Faro Furnell.

"Furnell?" snorted the old doctor, who shared the opinion of the sheriff and the majority of Chinook's residents regarding the old cowpuncher's character. "Forget him, Tolliver. You're out a good horse, that's all. He won't quit drifting till he hits the first saloon south of the Missouri. You've seen the last of that old rascal. Good riddance, I call it. No back talk out of you, either."

And he shoved a thermometer into Turkey Track's mouth.

That was some time during the morning. It was past noon when Chinook stood in wide-eyed wonderment while two men rode slowly down the main street. Faro Furnell had brought in Jack Manton.

When the loungers in front of the Last Chance and the feed barn had recovered from the first shock of surprize, they moved with sinister swiftness. Moved in one body toward the spot where Faro had halted his prisoner in front of the little jail. Most of them were armed. Half a dozen hard-twist grass lariats were grimly in evidence.

"It looks from here," Faro told his prisoner, "like the boys was aimin' tuh pull off a necktie party. Sheriff's outa town, too."

Manton wet his dry lips, red specks of fear lighting his shifting eyes. Abject, cringing fear that made him strain at the ropes that bound his wrists to the saddle-horn.

"My God, Furnell!" he begged hoarsely. "Turn me loose! Don't let 'em murder me, man! I was crazy drunk when I shot Tolliver! Make 'em gimme a fair trial! I never meant to kill him! I didn't come here to get you for killin' my father! He was a no-good snake that quit my mother when I was a kid. Why should I want to kill you? I told yuh why I come here. Save me, Furnell!"

As the crowd came slowly toward them, kicking up puffs of yellow dust that lay ankle deep in the street, Manton's voice broke into husky sobs.

Faro Furnell was weary to the point of utter exhaustion. His face, drawn and white, was bitten by deep lines. He sat his horse with an effort, his hands busy with tobacco and a brown paper, forcing a grin that showed like a ghastly grimace. He finished the construction of the cigaret, pulled a match across his saddle cantle, and lifted the cupped flame in hands that shook as if with ague.

"Save me, Furnell!" croaked Manton. "It'll square yuh for my dad's killin'!"

"Shut up," said Faro in a tired voice. "I brung yuh in fer hangin', didn't I? Trials is a waste uh time an' money. Quit blubberin' an' die like a man if yuh kin."

Lips bared in a mirthless grin, Faro faced the crowd that halted a few feet away. Curiosity had halted them. They looked up at the dust-powdered, tired-looking man who had brought in Manton. Their contempt gave way to decent respect for the man who had been Tolliver's swamper and the town drunkard. Most of that crowd had labeled him a rank coward who had run off. Now as their eyes searched his face, they looked for some miraculous change in Faro Furnell. They saw the same white hair, the same second-hand clothing, the same face that bore signs of the years of hard drink.

Had theirs been a sympathetic probing they would have found their miracle in the old cowpuncher's blue eyes. Those eyes had lost their look of hopeless suffering, their whisky bleariness. Bloodshot from heat and dust and lack of rest, but clear in their blue depths with new-born hope and determination.

A man with a rope in his hand stepped forward. Faro's eyes hardened as he recognized the man as one who had, in the passing years, treated him with cold contempt.

"We'll take that gent off yore hands," announced the man.

"You the boss uh this necktie party?" asked Faro.

"Sorter, I reckon. The doc says Turkey Track'll be well in a week er two but this 'breed needs hangin' anyhow."

"Turkey Track ain't dead?"

"Nope." The crowd, orderly enough but firmly determined in their purpose, edged forward.

"Keep yore shirts on, boys," called Faro. "I taken a heap uh trouble tuh fetch this Manton skunk back. I figger that if there's gonna be any kind uh doin's, I'm entitled to a hand in it. You claim this gent needs hangin' an' I plumb agree with yuh. But it's my doin's an' Turkey Track Tolliver's doin's. If Turkey Track says 'hang,' he hangs. If he says 'no hangin', it'll take some trouble tuh git him from me. I'm goin' over tuh auger some with ol' Turkey Track. I'm takin' Manton along."

Ignoring the scowling faces, the drawn guns, and the muttered threats of the men who barred his path, Faro Furnell rode through them, leading Manton's horse, down the street to Tolliver's house.

"Howdy!" boomed Tolliver's voice from an open window. "Howdy, you ol' hellion. I see yuh brung in the coyote."

"I told yuh not to take chips in the game," Faro replied. "What made yuh do it, pardner?"

"I was —— fool enough tuh think yuh couldn't handle the deal, Faro. I shore made a mistake. Now that yuh got him, what do yuh aim to do with him?"

"The boys," grinned Faro, " 'lowed they'd string him up. Bein' as yo're the gent that stopped his bullet, I'm leavin' it tuh you."

"An' I'll be as good as you are, feller. I don't eat dark meat. He's yourn fer better er worse, no holts barred an' devil take the hindmost. Yuh might jerk his meat an' scatter it fer coyote bait. It'd have pizen a-plenty in it without puttin' strychnine in it."

The crowd had followed down the street and again grouped themselves about Faro and his prisoner who still sat their horses. When Turkey Track finished speaking, Faro turned to them.

"Turkey Track has checked the bet to me, boys. You heered him. In lookin' over my cards, I reads 'em as a fair to middlin' hand. There ain't goin' to be no lynchin'."

"The —— there ain't!" called some one.

"Keep yore shirts on," grinned Faro. "Leastways till I'm done talkin'. Twenty years ago I killed Jack Manton. This son uh his, gittin' some wrong information somehow, thinks it's me that owns the Last Chance Saloon. So he shows up tuh collect some damages fer the killin' of his father which he admits was no account. He made the crack that I was too low down a bum tuh be a man. That it'd be rank murder tuh take a shot at me. An' I dunno but what he hit the nail on the head.

"Now, gents, I'm gonna turn this Jack Manton loose an' give him his gun. I'm heeled likewise. Him an' me will stand twenty feet apart an' shoot it out fair an' square. If he wins, let him go free."

Faro jerked out the two guns and hung them from his two forefingers crooked in the trigger guards. His eyes were two dancing blue lights as he grinned mockingly into the set face of Jack Manton.

"I spent twenty years regrettin' the killin' of the coyote that sired you, yuh yaller-eyed, white-livered coward. But when they plant you alongside him I'm gonna learn that song called 'The Circle C Dun' an' sing it when they throw dirt in yore face. One uh you boys cut his hands loose."

Grins of expectation rippled over the faces of the crowd. A ready knife set Manton free. Then, Faro Furnell, smiling grimly and holding Manton's eyes with a cold blue stare, handed the 'breed his gun, butt first.

His own gun balanced easily in his right hand, Faro reined his horse backward, step by step. The crowd hastily got out of the line of fire.

Manton, his face a pasty yellow, was breathing like a man who had been running. He held his gun stiffly, awkwardly, his eyes shifting as if they sought some path of escape.

"Well, Jack Manton," Faro Furnell's voice snapped the silence, "I'm waitin'. You got a even break. Take it, —— yuh!"

With a hoarse cry, Manton flung the weapon from him as if it burned his hand. Jabbing his spurs deep, he whirled his dun horse, flattening himself along the neck of the racing animal as it tore down the street toward the prairie beyond.

Faro, a tired smile twitching nervously at his bruised lips, watched him out of sight.

Then, so that Tolliver from his window, and the others who watched might see, Faro Furnell painstakingly shoved brass cartridges, one after another, into the empty chambers of the gun Tom McDonald had given him.

The man who had acted as leader of the lynching party picked Manton's gun out of the dust, examining it. The gun was loaded.

Turkey Track Tolliver knew that Faro Furnell, in his own way, according to his own lights, had laid forever the ghost of Jack Manton.

"I'll be seein' yuh, Turkey Track," he said, "in a week er two when the Bear Paw Pool wagon comes tuh town. Tom 'lowed he was short-handed an' there's a boy with the outfit that I'm gonna git tuh learn me the words uh 'The Circle C Dun.' Mebbeso they'll hook on the last verse now."

And so Faro Furnell, shoulders sagging wearily, full of aches and pains, rode out of town and across the hills, back to the country where he belonged.

It was none other than Turkey Track Tolliver who, months later, added the final verse to "The Circle C Dun".

Ol' Faro is a dealer
Whose game is on the square
He's roddin' of the Circle C
An' makin' good out there.

Now empty down yore licker
To the gamest cuss alive
Who killed Jack Manton's speerit
With a empty forty-five.

Looking About

IN AN editorial written in the summer of 1925 and referring back to one written a year or two earlier, I advocated forgiving the European debts, first because, if done rightly, it would be one of the biggest steps yet taken toward peace, second, because from a purely materialistic point of view it would be a profitable step. A deluge of unfavorable replies followed, with practically none endorsing the idea. Probably I was not the first to advocate this move, though at the time I had nowhere seen it advocated in print, but in any case it was a comparatively new idea to the public, and not a popular one.

As time progressed there seemed to be a change of attitude. Supporting letters began to flow in. At a Phi Beta Kappa dinner one of the country's best-known financiers made exactly the same statement, basing it on almost exactly the same materialistic reasons, though adding that it would be folly to attempt to get the American public to accept this point of view. A citizen wrote Secretary Mellon advocating forgiveness and represented sufficient public sentiment to elicit a public reply that stirred discussion on both sides of the water.

WE LIVE in a materialistic age, forgetting that since time began it is the idea, the ideal, that creates the thing, shapes it, destroys it. We have made a fetish of the word "practical," without in the least understanding the meaning of "practical," without seeing that by our materialistic interpretation of the word it brings us in the end materialistic fruits that are a mockery.

The average American has only two tests of what is "practical." First, nothing can be "practical" unless it "produces results." Only materialistic results are considered, they must be almost immediate if he is to visualize them at all, and he is very often mistaken in considering them desirable. Second, nothing can be "practical" if there clings to it even a faint odor of anything moral or idealistic, for to him morals are of the Sabbath only and "idealism" means merely an effeminate species of insanity. Strangely enough he fails to see that his own entire outlook upon the world, his very basis of assessment, is but the creation of what he scorns, an ideal, a poor one withal but one that shapes and controls him absolutely.

A CHIEF factor in saddling the materialistic point of view on us was our pretty general acceptance of one phase of economic determinism as a fundamental and comprehensive theory. That phase is not comprehensive and is no more fundamental than various other theories. Its acceptance is merely another example of man's habit of selecting one idea out of many equally good or better, crowning it as the *only* solution of life and applying whatever casuistry and force are needed to group all other ideas around it as seemingly subordinate to it. The path of history is strewn with thousands and thousands of such attempts. On many of them nations and civilizations have risen—and fallen. Economic determinism as generally interpreted is merely another of these *tour de force* theories on which nations and civilizations are rising—and falling.

It can not stand up under logical reasoning. The desire or need for property, including food, has been, is and always will be a mighty factor in determining the course of human events. But is it the sole determiner, a factor that always overrides other factors? Certainly not. Not only property and the means to sustain life, but life itself, have countless times been swept off the boards by pride, loyalty, honor, hate, love, revenge, political, social and individual ideals, religion. History bears witness clear back to its earliest pages. The daily papers carry on the proof.

The present power of economic determinism is only partly inherent. When man adopts any idea or theory and builds a civilization upon it as foundation it naturally becomes increasingly powerful. But so would some other idea if he had chosen that instead.

Europe and America have been making economic determinism their guide. *To* *what has it led us?* To a civilization developed along materialistic lines at the expense of all other lines. Through a devastating world war to the dread of one even more devastating. To a worship of the Golden Calf that is beginning to alarm even its worshipers lest "The Dollar Über Alles" slogan, the Creed of Greed, wipe out all that is really best in life, lest what is at most only a means to happiness wipe out happiness itself.

IN ADVOCATING forgiveness of European debts I realized that to gain any attention I must argue along materialistic lines, so I offered to wager that before ten or twenty years have passed we'll be forced to admit, from the materialistic point of view, that it would have paid us better in dollars and cents to have forgiven those debts than to have gone on trying to collect them. I'll only outline my materialistic reasons here:

We can afford to. Of our nearly six billion dollar national debt retirement since the war eighty-seven per cent. has been accomplished by receipts from within the United States, and our continued prosperity has been a recent campaign slogan. We have already remitted, through principal and interest, the greater part of the European debt; we can afford to cancel the remainder.

Europe is a market as well as a competitor. Remission of the debt would reduce European taxes and enable her the more quickly to become once more a market able to buy heavily. It would tend to lower European barriers against American trade.

The debt makes Europe hate us.

The debt makes Europe covet the wealth we are amassing, partly at her expense.

The debt gives Europe a common ground for uniting against us.

The debt, and the poverty it increases, forces Europe to the strongest possible economic campaign against us.

The debt, and the coveted wealth of the nation she hates, makes Europe consider whether it wouldn't be cheaper to make war on us than to attempt to live in peace with us as a creditor.

It took us a year of frantic preparation after declaring war before we could actually take the field in the World War. We are almost as unprepared now as we were then. Europe is constantly preparing. She controls the sea and the air. European holdings in North, Central and South America, in the West Indies, await her as bases. The Canal, Alaska, Hawaii, Guam, the Philippines, cut off by sea, air and land, will fall easily into the lap of any fairly strong European combination. Our thousands of miles of seaboard invite her. And she would give us no year for preparation, nor half a year, nor a month, or even a week. Despite our national self-conceit, we are fat with wealth and unprepared to defend that wealth. Europe is lean and poor, hates us, covets our wealth, finds it costly to remain at peace with us and is able to take our wealth by force. If economic determinism, either popular or scientific, means anything it certainly means something here.

SO MUCH for the materialistic reasons, the only kind that easily gain a hearing in these days of ours but to which I do not attach the main importance. There is a better and a stronger reason for forgiving those debts.

There is much theorizing as to how to bring about permanent world peace. What we need more than theorizing is acts. There is much talk about sectarianism, fundamentalism, new thought and even religion. What we need is less talk and more works. If the various sects wish to regain for religion its lost hold upon the people they will have to become Christians first and sectarians very much second. At present, so far as the general public is concerned, they seem to be sectarians and hair-splitters first and Christians very, very much second. The change from sectarianism to Christianity will involve turning from minor points of doctrine to the essence of Christ's teaching—the Golden Rule, the saving of one's own soul through service to others instead of through arguments over creed and dogma. And, having turned to the essence of Christ's teaching, they'll have to *practise* it. Seven days a week, not one. In offices and capitols as well as in pews.

At present if you suggest forgiving the European debt the percentage of sectarians who recoil in materialistic and dollar-pinching horror is very high. Yet this same percentage will doubtless blandly continue to pray that their debts be forgiven as they forgive their debtors—and continue to wonder why sectarianism is losing its hold on the people. The two things the Christian religion needs today are not heresy trials and arguments on dogmas. The two things it needs are Christianity and guts.

If you don't like the last word and find yourself dodging the main issue by sounding a noble charge against a monosyllable, change the word to "faith." Or "faith and works." Or "courage." Or "sincerity."

SUPPOSE that, instead of coldly calculating just how many dollars our debtors would be capable of paying and then trying to extract the last dollar, we had said to Europe, in effect: "You are impoverished by the war. We are enriched. We are Christians and your brothers. Therefore this debt is forgiven, as we would have you forgive it if we were the debtors."

Idealistic? Yes, it's Christianity. Dangerous to give them wherewithal for greater armaments? That fear is lack of faith.

There are many real Christians in this country who would be willing to do just that. But they are a minority. The others and most of the non-Christians would have to be shown that it would pay us to do it, that it would be good business.

Well, it would have been. The use of the money for armament could have been prevented by making a condition, say, that the amount of the debt should be raised by each nation and then devoted by it to extra and direct benefits to its people. Or we could have collected it and given it back in the form of such benefits. And that one act of forgiveness, unique in history, startling in its practical application of Christianity, would have done more to ensure lasting peace than has all the wrangling over World Courts and Leagues of Nations. It would have made us friends where now we have enemies. It would have been a magic touch that no diplomacy could even approximate.

FOR if it is the diplomats and the lords of finance who make wars, it is the people who do the fighting. Economic determinism or no economic determinism, there can be no wars unless the people do the fighting. The few have always been able to diddle them into it if they showed reluctance, but since the awfulness of the World War new ideas have been growing among the peoples of many nations. Hence the insistent demand for the settlement of disputes by other means than war. Hence the complaints against secret diplomacy, against other and more fundamental phases of existing government. Hence youth and woman movements against war, and pacifist leagues pledged to refuse war service. Hence the proposal to draft capital and labor as well as fighting men. The people themselves are going to become more and more a factor in determining whether a country goes to war. The question of their friendship versus their hate becomes more important than ever before.

As things now are, not only do the peoples of Europe hate us, quite naturally, but the careful diplomacy of some governments seems to be fostering that hatred. This fostering may not be preparatory war propaganda but nothing else could be better adapted to that purpose. The peoples have not forgotten the old lies of war propaganda but they are still susceptible to new methods of approach. Our dollar-grabbing policy provides the diplomats and financiers of Europe with an ideal tool for building up a war sentiment against us.

All this, of course, is no higher than materialism, since it all translates into doing good for profit and is likely to add the smudge of hypocrisy. At least it shows that materialism has not proved itself really practical in this case.

BUT, however the craze of materialism may have swept our country, there is still in many Americans a something that prompts the forgiveness of these debts for more decent reasons than ultimate self-gain. Real Christianity, courageous Christianity, even though we do not call it by that name, is not yet dead among us. We do not entirely forget our brotherhood with those who chance to live on the other side of international boundaries. Individually we have given millions to Europe's needs. Sympathy, kindliness, helpfulness have not ceased to exist. Materialism and wealth have turned America's head; they have not yet turned her heart.

But you would not think so from the performance of our representatives. Nor can you greatly blame those who call us Shylocks.

From even the materialistic point of view our representatives have been stupid. The dollars they grab for are likely to cost us many times that number of dollars. They remitted most of the debt and, instead of getting any kind of credit for so doing, got only hatred. Having remitted the greater part, in striving to extract the remainder they are making the debtor nations fear and hate us as much as if we were demanding and really getting every cent of it. Secretary Mellon's statement, while plainly designed for its effect upon the public mind rather than for a full presentation of facts in their true relation and perspective, naively admits remitting the greater part but demanding the last pound of flesh our debtors could give up without dying on our hands. Like Shylock, our representatives seem to have forgotten that you can't extract the pound of flesh without causing blood to flow.

As to their duty to the people they represent their record is no better, though quite in keeping with practical politics. In Mr. Mellon's statement the righteous plea that there had been no warrant of expressed public opinion for the remitting of the remainder serves as key to the general situation—and to the usual politician's method of handling the people. Our representatives, including Congress, had the duty of making the best possible bargain for us—not necessarily the most Shylockian bargain, though most of them could see no other kind of bargain to be driven. There are only two courses open to a representative. Either he must consider himself chosen to think and decide in place of those he represents or else he must consider himself a mere mouthpiece in duty bound to vote and act only in accordance with the sentiments of those he represents. The common political practise is to shift back and forth, using as an excuse whichever of the two theories fits his convenience in a given case. In the debt case the greater part was remitted on the first theory, the remainder left unremitted on the second.

THE various representatives, including all those involved in any way in the handling of the foreign debt question, are obviously not the ones who can repair the damage they have wrought. Even if capable of recognizing the damage and of formulating proper remedy, any step they might take, however right, would be in the eyes of European peoples only officialdom's recession from its former position, attributable to fear, insincerity or financial and selfish long-sightedness. At this stage the mere forgiveness of the remaining indebtedness can accomplish comparatively little. The real results would come from the manner of forgiving. No manner can be successful if it is not born of sincerity, unselfishness and a real desire for friendship and peace. Any movement to forgive these debts must originate among the American people themselves, our representatives being used only to carry out our wishes and very carefully labeled as only the mouthpieces of popular sentiment.

The question now arises: "Are the American people sufficiently generous, unselfish and brotherly to originate such a movement?"

AS ANNOUNCED in our last issue, *Adventure* is going to break away from the confusing magazine habit of having each issue dated a month ahead from the time it actually goes on sale. This December issue, for example, went on sale in November. We're through with all that. Our January issues are going to appear in January.

But what's going to appear in December? The issues labeled December have already appeared and there won't be a January issue until January. That little joker is one of the chief reasons why most of the magazines haven't shaken free from this bad habit of dating ahead. Well, we're going to overcome that difficulty by getting out an extra or special issue during December—on the 8th of the month but bearing the date of December 31. Regular subscribers will have it added to their subscription without extra cost and without changing the expiration date, and it will sell on the newsstands at the regular price. In "The Trail Ahead," on the last page of this issue, you can find out what is going to be in this special number. Then we'll begin the year 1927 on the simple and sensible basis of having the January issues appear in January.

There's going to be another improvement. Our dates of issues are now the 8th and the 23rd. We'll simplify this matter too. Beginning with our January issues *Adventure* will go on sale the 1st and the 15th, the first of the month and the very middle of the month. These are the logical dates and the easiest to remember.

So here is what to look for:

On December 8, the special number, dated December 31
On January 1, the number dated January 1
On January 15, the number dated January 15

Here's to simplicity and common sense.

A. S. H.

A *free-to-all* Meeting-Place

The Camp

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The spirit of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship

MORE as to six-masted square-riggers, from Captain Dingle. The differences in statements seem to arise from the fact that barques are only partly square-rigged. The Standard Dictionary, which is our official guide in the office, spells it "bark" but out of deference to the deep-sea sailors, who abhor that spelling, we abandon the Standard in this case. Even to landsmen there is far more appeal in the older spelling.

Halifax, Nova Scotia.

DEAR CAMP-FIRE:—Just to correct Captain Rotch's statement regarding six-masted square-riggers, permit me to say that there are no six-masted square-riggers, nor has there ever been one in the sense of the term relating to real sailing-ship rigs. The *Great Eastern* had six masts, and some were square-rigged; but neither Gordon Young nor Captain Rotch had that abortion in mind. The vessels Captain Rotch names were all five-masters. I have seen *Preussen* (not *Prussian*) many times, also *Kobenhavn* and *France*, and have photos of—haven't photo here, so can't say the first name—*Rickmers** (not *Rickmas*), and *Potosi*, five-masted barque. All had five masts, and *Preussen* was a full-rigged ship. The rest barques. Lloyd's Register will bear this out, even if many of Camp-Fire readers have not personally fallen in with some of the ships mentioned.

As for six-masted schooners being fairly common, there were never more than six, I am sure. And the last one on the Atlantic side was burned during the winter of 1925-6. There may be two left on the Pacific side, but it is doubtful if there are more afloat now. And of course there was the one seven-masted failure, *Thomas W. Lawson*, lost in the English Channel some years ago. She would "neither steer, stay nor wear," and was never a sailing ship in anything but name. I passed her

*P. S.—*Sophie Rickmers* was a steamer now named *Westphalia.*

for **Readers, Writers and Adventurers**

Fire

has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

once at sea in a hundred-ton schooner. She was eight thousand. We sailed around her in the good-old-fashioned way.

Cheerio, and Luck to The Gang—DINGLE.

ONE of you wrote us a long letter, enclosing an article from the Dearborn *Independent*, but since, contrary to Camp-Fire custom, he did not wish his name printed with his letter, neither name nor letter is printed. However, I sent it to Harold Lamb of our writers' brigade, who as you know is an old crony of Genghis Khan, Prester John, Tamerlane *et al*, and his reply makes plain the general drift of letter and article. He's always a good man to turn to for help, for he not only knows whereof he speaks but handles everything thoroughly—in this case, having omitted one point from his first letter, he was good enough to write a second.

Berkeley, California.

I've discussed the J. S. letter with several men, from anthropological, archeological and historical angles. A couple of these chaps are authorities, more or less. Here's the gist of what we threshed out:

1. S. has the merit of being sincere, and plain spoken.

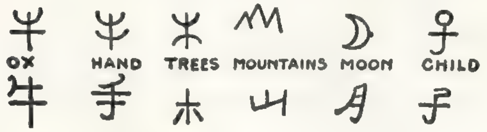
2. The theory, that the yellow race is a product of black and white, is not proved in any way in the enclosed data, or elsewhere. In fact the contrary can easily be proved.

By the various tests (anthropologically speaking) the white man is fundamentally different from the black and is actually between the black and yellow. (Take one test, body structure: Black—long legs, short body; white, long legs, long body; yellow, long body, short legs.) Anthropologists deny that you can produce the yellow man by breeding black with white. Prove it by nature of hair, color of skin, shape of eye, skull formation, etc.

I know nothing about that, but it looks to me as if there is almost nothing behind this theory, and a well organized trench system against it.

3. Take history. Dr. Legendre says that the Huns brought great numbers of conquered blacks—slaves—back to Central Asia and China. The evidences are against this. Where and when did the conquering Hunnish tribes ever have direct contact with the blacks? He assumes that the present yellow peoples of China are a product of a *possible* white Hun race, and a *possible* infusion of slave blacks. The Huns (Alans, Vandals, Mongols, etc.) never crossed the seas.

Legendre also draws in Babylonia, and Egypt, to explain Chinese ancient culture, arts, etc. There's been a lot of bunk poured out about ancient Egypt. DeLacouperie and others have taken pains to trace the source of early Chinese writing to Egypt. Early Chinese ideographs are nothing more or less than modified picture-writing.



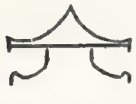
I've seen enthusiastic "scientists" take just as many pains to identify early American picture-writing with the Chinese. There are resemblances. And you can easily find resemblances to the above ideographs in the pictures drawn by a five-year-old child, and Kipling's "Just So Stories."

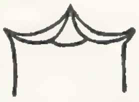
Same with the "Babylonian" lions, griffons. The formula is this— "There were lions and bone lions in China; *ergo* and therefore the grotesque stone lions of Chinese art were derived from Babylonian art. How? Well, the Persians took Babylonian art to themselves. Chinese trade caravans came into contact with Persia—and so on.

All this is hypothesis. So with the Chinese dragon.

UNDOUBTEDLY—and this has been ascertained by the explorations of Sir Marcus Aurel Stein, Sven Hedin, French missions, etc.—Chinese art owes much to Greek, and more to Aryan India. Just as the Buddhist-morality Chinese system of living owes much to Buddhist India and Tibet.

But, because certain beginnings of Chinese art can be traced to Greece and India, remotely, is no possible reason for denying that the early Chinese had a typical art and a typical culture.


PAGODA ROOF


TATAR TENT

(I have before me a series of reproductions of Persian, Arabic and Turkish miniature paintings of the eleventh to seventeenth century. From the archives of the Bibliotheque Nationale. And the Persian and Turkish painters of the fourteenth century used Chinese technique.)

The point being that Legendre is "full of prunes, pink 'uns" when he says that since these borrowings can be traced, there is no native Chinese art.

You can trace one of the most typical features of Chinese architecture to the Tatars. The drooping, curving roof lines.

But it's absurd to argue that because the Tatars had tents, the Chinese had no architecture. And what of the purely Chinese inventions—cross-bow, B.C. 400; gunpowder, A.D. 900; paper, silk, astronomical instruments, clocks, etc., *ad infin.?*

I'VE never seen Legendre's book, and can't place him, except that his work seems to have appeared in *L'Illustration* rather than in the *Revue des Missions Archeologique*, etc.

Most of what he says is quite so, and has been said before. The present-day Chinese *are* a conglomerate of different races, speaking different dialects, even separate languages. The origin of the earliest "Chinese" *is* uncertain, but is placed pretty definitely in the Gobi, west of Shansi, which was then a fertile land.

And it's true that instead of being a pure-strain, awfully ancient and mysterious and cultured race, the Chinese have interbred with different conquering nations, have borrowed most of their culture and its ideas. But the net product is Chinese, not Aryan mixed with negro bastards.

IT SEEMS to me that Legendre is arguing like most Frenchmen, from theory to fact, instead of from proved fact to theory.

Take his point that the armies of Attila, Genghis Khan and Tamerlane, etc., were not made up of yellow men, that is, of Chinese and Mongols only. Perfectly true, in a way. Take the horde of Genghis Khan. It was made up, eventually, of Kankalis, Kiptchaks, Ouighurs, Naimans—Ural-Altaic tribes, or Turko-Mongols. Also of Keraits, Mongols and Tatars, and the ancestors of the present Manchurians, Koreans and native Siberians. The Mongols were only one tribe of nomads that eventually won leadership over the others.

These tribes, the Turko-Mongols, as we call them, fathered in a very early day the American Indian, later the Huns, then another branch, the Mongols, the Moghuls who conquered India, the Manchus who conquered China. They were always hard boiled, remarkably interesting, and warriors par excellence.

Remnants of them are found, as Legendre points out, in Bulgaria, and the Balkans today, in the Finns and Kalmuks of Russia, as well as the Circassians of the Caucasus and the Caspian region.

The origin of these horse-riding nomads who came out of Central Asia and overran more than half of the earth is one of the nicest questions of modern research. To summarize hugely—the nomad Turko-Mongol is the descendant of the Scythian and the Scythian is "x" in the equation. Who *was* he?

ARTHUR BRODEUR answered that question. The Scythian was the man who lived in Scythia, which is ancient Turkestan, B.C. 1000. What kind of man was he? He called himself, collectively, the *Tokharoi* and other things, and he had a writing, which is now christened Tokharian, and resembles both Sanscrit and German. Branches of him spread into Kashmir and Tibet, and established civilizations.

Was this Tokharian, as we may call him, a nomad out of Northern Europe? Or was he a highly cultured Aryan of Persian ancestry out of the Mesopotamia basin? He seems to have been Aryan, witness his writing, his weapons. But, —— little is known about the gentleman, though information is coming in yearly.

Hence the persistent rumors of "white" civilization in ancient Central Asia—the early Chinese references to "blue-eyed barbarians." Our legends of "White Huns," etc. And we hear that Genghis Khan had red hair, and that Kubilai Khan looked like a "white" man. Throwbacks?

Well, we have traced this Aryan, horse-riding, Sanscrit-like writing and long-sword-fighting chap back to 1000 B.C. and we aren't in the least sure how white he was then. Perhaps he was then more white than yellow and he certainly wasn't negro.

But when his children, a couple of thousand years later, came out of Central Asia, *our* fathers in Europe didn't see any family resemblance at all—in fact called them devils. They were the Huns, the Alans, the Vandals, etc.

And when his grandchildren came out of Central Asia about twenty-three centuries later, our ancestors called them servants of Antichrist, and spawn of Gog and Magog, and "Tatars." And our ancestors ran away from them. And, though there were many Nestorian Christians among the Mongols and they seemed really eager to claim the European Christians as brothers of a sort, the Pope and all would have nothing to do with them. So our Tokharian's great-grandchildren became either Muhammadan or Buddhist.

Enough of this! But you can see why it's illogical to say, as Legendre hints, that Genghis Khan and his Mongols were "white" men, and, because of that, victorious conquerors. They were victorious because they were —— good fighters, and had remarkable leaders.

IT'S like Prester John. Our medieval ancestors believed from various tales that an enormously wealthy Christian monarch ruled in Central Asia, a white man.

The fact of it was that Wang Khan, one of the Keraits (Krits, hence "Christians") ruled that part of Central Asia, that he was a Turko-Mongol who wandered about in barbaric splendor and some of his family were Nestorian Christians, and a large part of his people likewise.

So Genghis Khan was a Turko-Mongol nomad, whose ancestors probably were Aryan two thousand years before, who had red hair. He wasn't a white man in the sense that St. Louis of France, who lived about the same generation, was a white man. He was Genghis Khan, and a wonder at that.

To yawp that Genghis Khan was a white man, whose children were bastardized by negro captives, and produced the Mongols of today, is simply the bunk.—H. L.

As an afterthought, on the Seller-Legendre, yellow race, descent of Mongols matter—the most important point was left out of my letter. The most important ethnological point, dating back a couple of thousand years. That is, the Mongol-Tatar tribes are not wholly of Turkish extraction. It follows, that they are not wholly of Indo-Scythian descent.

I have a lot of respect for the German, Professor Friedrich Hirth. This is what he says of the people between the Sea of Aral and Korea: "The Huns should be looked upon as a political and not a racial union. The Huns proper, as the dominant race (about 300 A.D.) were *probably* of Turkish extraction. So were the Hiung-nu, their predecessors in the east." (Note the Hiung-nu—Wu-sun, Yue-chi, etc., are the chaps that had Aryan forefathers, maybe.) "But the Hiung-nu as a political power comprised ancestors of the races which we now separate from them as being of Mongol and Tungusic extraction."

All of which simply means that the Huns who wandered over into Europe were part of a confederacy of Central Asia tribes that were variously descended—part Indo-Scythian, part Turkish, part aboriginal Siberian.

NOW, glancing at a book written by d'Ohsson, who was an authority on the Mongols in his day, we find this: "There were three distinct races, Turks, Mongol-Tatars, and Tungusis, or Tchortes (Devils)."

This is encouraging, because it fits with what a lot of modern ethnologists say that there are three different races, the Turks of Central Asia, the Mongol-Manchu tribes north and west of China proper, and the Esquimaux tribes up under the Arctic circle.

Every one disagrees heartily as to whether the American Indian is descended from the Esquimaux (as the Lap and Finn are) or from the Mongol-Tartar-Tungusi-Manchu layer, a little way south of the Arctic regions. I asked an ethonologist out here from whom the Mongol-Tartar-Manchu-Tungusi chaps were descended, and he said, "From the Chinese, of course." No one knows where the Chinese came from. So there we are! Authorities say so many different things about the ancestry of the Central Asia people before 200-300 A.D. that a modern story-teller like myself can't summarize their opinions.

THE legends of Central Asia, the Prester John mystery, the White Huns, the sand-buried ruins of the Gobi, the unknown Tokharoi and their language, the remnants of Alexander's Greeks, the Aryans tucked away in the mountains here and there, the red-haired conqueror, Genghis Khan, all these are intensely interesting to us today and we are just beginning to get at the facts behind them. It's the greatest treasure house of the world, and that's why men like Stein, Sven Hedin, Koslof, Hoernle, Andrews, Osborne, Huntington, etc., are devoting their lives to the exploration of Central Asia. The secrets hidden away there loom gigantic.

But as to the S.-Legendre (as quoted in the Dearborn *Independent*) line of argument that there never was a yellow race, and that the armies of Genghis Khan conquered most of the world because they were white men, well, I pass the yellow race on to ethnologists. As to Genghis Khan, it's not often that a serious-minded fiction writer can say to a scientist, "You're drawing on your imagination, old chap."

THERE was, among Genghis Khan's horde, a kind of affinity for Christians. Remember that after the generation of St. Thomas and St. Andrew, many early Christians penetrated Central

Asia. They were Nestorians, mostly, and built churches all the way into Sinkiang in China. Among such tribes as the Keraits, the Christians were very numerous—hence the Prester John legend.

In the day of Genghis Khan these Nestorian Christians, the tribesmen of the Gobi region, had almost forgotten ritual and reading, but clung to the symbol of the Cross, and to semi-barbaric prayers. They were probably better Christians than most of us in America today.

Anyway, the Mongols were, literally, death to Muhammadans. But they dealt, for them, leniently with the semi-Christian Georgians of the Caucasus and really spared the Armenians. Marco Polo and the first Jesuits were kindly received at "Kambalu" Khan-Váligh—King's City, and Kublai Khan is said to have been half-Christian in his ideals. The Nestorian churches still existed. Hulagu, the Mongol prince who conquered Bagdad, wiped out the Assassins, etc., and protected the Christians in his province. (I've read a contemporary Muhammadan account that complains of how the "cursed Nazarenes" put on their best garments, men, women and children, and paraded the streets openly, with songs, on the day that Hulagu issued his decree. Also, this Mongol threw open the Sepulchre to Christians. His wife was one. His successor, Abaka, was also.

At this time the Mongols in the Syria sector sent several letters to St. Louis, the Pope, etc., urging that the Franks and Mongols unite in driving the Moslems out of Syria and Egypt. But the Christians were too busy scrapping among themselves. And when the Mongol khans requested priests from Europe, two or three barefoot Jesuits were sent, brave men, but lacking authority, prestige or presence. By degrees the Mongols in Asia were converted to Buddhism, in Persia, the Black Sea region, etc., to Muhammadanism.

So much for lost opportunity and the narrow-mindedness of our medieval European princes and Popes. We've sent enough missionaries since into all Asia and accomplished infinitely less than could have been accomplished then.—Harold Lamb.

THIS doesn't answer a comrade's query concerning ancient earthworks in Tennessee but it presents us with another set of earthworks to find out about. Will some archeologist or historian give us the answer?

Cavanalee Farms,
Russellville, Tennessee.

Attention, "Camp-Fire" of April 8, article by Carl Painter, Chattanooga, on prehistoric earthworks in Cumberland Mountains. All I know of them is that as far back as 1844 they were commented on but nobody knew anything. The article I read was in an old *Southern Magazine* of about that date.

THERE is something on that order in my own neighborhood about three miles southeast of where I live. For identification, we call it the Whitesburg Silver Mine. It is prehistoric, for descendants of the old North Carolina "Land Granters" still live here, probably half the population, and there are no family legends of their working at it.

About ten years ago we formed a small company of "gold hunters" and opened up one shaft. It went down forty feet and stopped square at solid rock. We then opened up another shaft. It went down to the same level and turned horizontally into the hill. We uncovered the chestnut timber supports of the horizontal shaft and utilized them. There was a mud cave-in and we were afraid to go farther and the crowd did not care to spend any more money unless we knew what we were after. The formation of that district is peculiar and the rocks heavy. They may have iron or lead but I do not think there is any silver or gold. There was a tremendous amount of work done originally. Looks like regular railroad cuts.

There is a local legend that the work was done by Spaniards from Mexico, that the Indians closed in on them one day and they put one part of their treasure in the shaft we failed to follow up, carried the balance to Bays Mountain and buried it. The Indians drove them across the Mississippi. This was a long chase, as I live in upper east Tennessee. In later years some of the Spaniards got together and started back. Yellow fever got them near Natchez. What I want to know is, if the yellow fever carried them off near Natchez, who preserved this message for the men who came with Boone?—H. G. Patterson.

WHAT he says would seem to be true—that he has employed his spare time in seeing the out-of-the-way corners of the earth. Major Charles Gilson follows Camp-Fire custom and rises to introduce himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine. His work is well known in England.

Though I've done a good deal of globe-trotting, I actually lived during the early years of my life in foreign countries. As a young soldier on foreign service, having no relations to speak of, I invariably employed my leave in out-of-the-way places. I started off in Malta, but was invalided home from there with Malta fever; but, though I very nearly died, went out to the Boer War in South Africa shortly afterward. There I marched on my flat feet as a company officer many thousands of miles; and my memories of that romantic country are still very fresh and delightful. I saw a great deal of very stiff fighting, and was not dangerously wounded until the last engagement in which my regiment took part. At Diamond Hill I had every man with me killed or wounded, but myself never got a scratch. For a time I was doing ox transport work, and although I was only a very young man at the time, about twenty-two years old, I had command of a big convoy, many thousands of oxen and hundreds of natives of all nationalities—Basutos, Zulus, Fingos, Cape Boys, Hottentots, etc.

I WAS very badly smashed up, being shot several times at almost point-blank range, at the conclusion of a charge, where we recaptured a section of guns that had been taken not ten minutes before. Those guns fired on the enemy's advance, were turned round and opened on us, to be reversed again for Parthian shots at the retreating Boers. Though we came out on top, we lost over fifty per cent. of the men engaged in twenty minutes' fighting.

After that I was on my back for six months and on crutches for nearly a year. I rejoined my regiment in China, and found time to travel a bit in the south of the country before I went up to the north. There I did some topographical work for the British Intelligence Department, surveying country out of the beaten track and seeing a good deal of native life. I also traveled to the very north over the Great Wall in Manchuria, and went with George Morrison then the *Times* correspondent in Pekin and afterward political advisor to the Chinese Government, into Corea.

Morrison, as many Americans know, was one of the most remarkable men who ever lived. I learned more of the country from him than from any one else. I had an enormous respect for him; and it was he who told me to throw up the Army and take to literature.

WHILST I was in north China I learned Japanese and mastered the language well enough to make three journeys into what was then almost unknown Japan, where a European evoked a certain amount of curiosity.

Strangely enough, however, I have never been able to write about Japan—I believe, because I never liked the people. The same, to a less extent, applies to South Africa, my two brief visits to the east and west coasts, if they did not afford more material, at least appealed more to my imagination.

In China I got sunstroke, after which I got long leave, during which I went out to Hawaii, where I stayed in Honolulu for six weeks and saw something of the islands. From there I went down to a weird place that, I believe, was called Hau Island, where one man lived by himself, collecting coconuts with a gang of Kanakas for the manufacture of soap. He was a strange customer, almost wild himself, and very interesting. Then I went to Fiji where I knew the head of the police, and I learned a bit from him. I then found my way to Australia, and got down to Melbourne where I had friends by way of Port Darwin, Thursday Island and Sydney. I stayed for some weeks out on a sheep station in Tasmania, got a bit of shooting and kangaroo hunting, and fed up with mutton. Came up to Singapore by way of the East Indies, including Java. It was a very small ship; and we were as near as a touch wrecked off the Great Barrier Reef. I was a year in Singapore, and did some shooting in the Johore jungle, and then got dysentery and only just pulled through.

I came back to England more or less an invalid, though I soon afterward took another sea voyage round the African coast, and on one or two occasions later knocked about Europe—France, Italy, Austria-Hungary and Spain.

DURING these years, as was natural enough, a few adventures came my way, and I have made a generous use of them. Of late years, however, literary work has pretty well tied me down, and of course the Great War cut a big slice out of the best years of one's life—thirty-six to forty. I am now forty-eight.

I was in France only in 1914; and those terrific months are too well known to say anything about. I had an offer of a war correspondent job, and had I thought of my own interests, I should have taken it; but I believed that as a trained soldier of the Regular Army my services were wanted. I was married then, and it was largely for that reason that I took on a home job as commandant of various military prisons. It was interesting work, of great service, though without kudos. One had to train the untrainable, deserters and those who weren't for it. We worked out an excellent system, and got these chaps drafted straight to the front as soon as they could be certified efficient. I believe I had as many as twenty thousand men through my hands altogether.

Since the War I have filled up my spare time with all sorts of jobs I didn't know I could do. I have designed and laid out many gardens, and have been my own plumber, bricklayer, painter and motor mechanic; but would rather play golf than anything else.—C. G.

FOR several issues now we have published biographical sketches of our authors at the end of Camp-Fire so that readers who may not have been present when the authors joined our writer's brigade may meet them now. This time we are presenting Wilkeson O'Connell.

His first story in our magazine in 1925 was a war story—by which is meant a story of the World War—but almost all of his work since then has been in the field of American history dealing either with earlier wars or with episodes on the lives of the pioneers and frontiersmen. Mr. O'Connell has the gift of making us feel that our forebears really lived.

His own life has not been eventful, as the world interprets the word. He was born at Plattsburg, N. Y., December 24, 1894. He never received a formal education, since he was considered "too delicate to go to the public school," but being of an inquiring disposition and having access to a good library, he is as "educated" as any one could wish. His stories, if nothing else, bear witness to this.

Mr. O'Connell spent his childhood in New York State—Plattsburg, on his grandfather's farm near Buffalo and Fort Niagara. In 1902 he went west to Mount Clemens, Michigan, then to Hot Springs, Arkansas. He lived in San Francisco in 1903 and 1904 and the next two years in Fort Snelling, Minn.

Since then he has resided in Ithaca, New York, from where he occasionally runs down to the city of New York to see a play or enjoy a concert. He enjoys bridge, friendly conversation and books.

Mr. O'Connell frequently writes of country which he knows, and has caught army "atmosphere" and ways of speech from his early life in military posts, but of course most of his historical material is drawn from books. He reads biographies and old histories full of anecdotes and gossip rather than the more modern accounts which, while more accurate, lack color and detail. Enjoyment is what Mr. O'Connell seeks when he reads. Probably that is why other people enjoy what he writes.—J. M. C.

Ask

QUESTIONS *and* ANSWERS

General Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere

STRAIGHT

A News Bulletin of Outdoor Equipment

ADVENTURE'S TRAVEL ASSOCIATION

A Service Organization with Stations and Experts all over the World

Siam

ONLY one book in a foreign language about the legendry of this country where the dancing girls spend hours with their fingers pressed against their knees so that their hands may develop a backward curve.

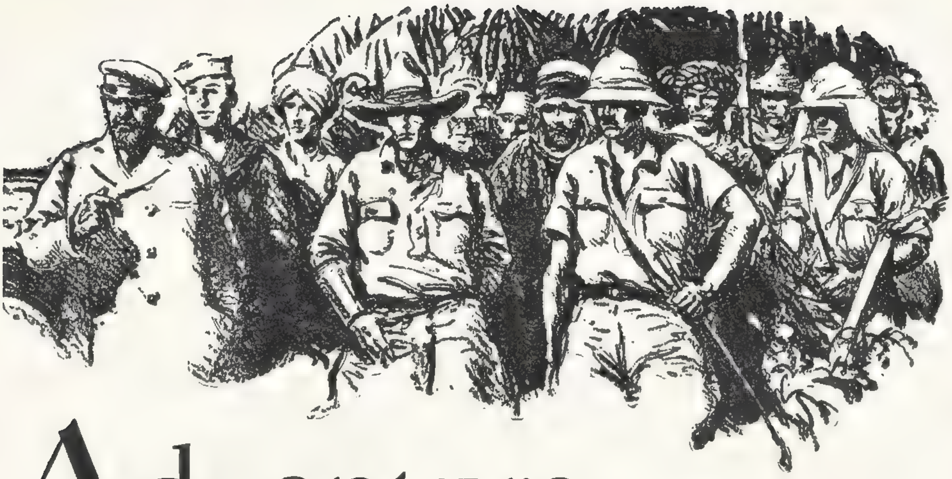
Request:—"Would you help us out? A friend and I are very much interested in Siam, particularly ancient Siam, as a possible subject for a play or ballet. But our resources are small, and we wondered if you would and could answer the following:

1. What are the best books on Siamese legendry and mythology, if any?
2. What are Siamese dramatics like? What sort of gesture (stiff, natural, etc.), what sort of language (flowery or simple), and what tones of voice (chant, sing-song, natural, etc.)? What sort of subject? We are trying to keep away from the love element in plot.
3. What are the gods of the older Siamese religion?
4. What is the origin and early history of these people?
5. How do they dance? What sort of music do they have?

I'm sorry to bother you with such questions, but practically all the material we have been able to find has to do with architecture, dress and present-day history."—GRACE ADAMS, Grinnell, Iowa.

Reply, by Mr. MacCreagh:—I know of only one book in any language other than Siamese. It is—of course—in German and goes into the matter with German professorial thoroughness. The title is, I think, "Erforschunge in die Glaubensbekennthisse des Siamesischen Folkes." A ponderous thing which I myself have no more than glanced at, and that a long time ago; so I can't tell you anything worth while on that subject; nor can I tell you where you could get hold of a copy of the book.

As to dramatics: I know of no books at all; though, if you can get anything on Burmese dramatics you would get a fair second-hand insight



Adventure

BOOKS YOU CAN BELIEVE

Verdicts by Experts on the Authenticity of Current Non-Fiction

GOODS

and Commodities Tested by Our Experts

OLD SONGS THAT MEN HAVE SUNG

Collecting and Discussing Old Songs still Living among the People

into what the Siamese variety would be like, for they are very similar. The trouble again is, where would you get hold of the book? There is a very concise and well-illustrated brochure on Burmese theatricals entitled "The Burmese Pwe" by Mrs. Chan Tun, published by—alas—Thacker, Spink & Co. of Calcutta. Only goodness knows where a copy might be found in this country.

I can, however, tell you something about gesture, and I enclose a photograph of a pair of Me-Kong dancers which will show you the costume they wear. As you will see from the restricted skirt, the dance must perforce consist of mere shufflings of the feet accompanied by rhythmic—and often very graceful—undulations of the body and arms. A peculiarity which is immediately noticeable and characteristic is the position of the fingers which are held at all times turned upward as much as possible. I don't mean turned up to heaven; but turned the opposite way to the normal bend of the knuckles.

This is considered very classy and beautiful, and dancing girls spend long hours pressing their fingers against their knees to the point almost of dislocation in order to induce the desired back curve. The gestures are in turn accompanied by long-winded lyrics in a rising and falling sing-song of not unpleasing tone. Perhaps a diagram will convey some sort of idea. The rhythm adheres strictly to the tempo of the dance. The story is the universal one of the peasant maiden who knocks the handsome prince coocoo with a single look between the eyes.

gre-et
shall I my prince
How to
day? Shall I
paint my face
-kha?
-na
-low with ta
yel
a jas-
-ry mine
shall I car bloom?
Or

But you want to keep away from the sickly sentimental. Good. You can turn to war, of course, or—witchcraft. There's a delightful story about a king who was too fond of sport; pony-racing and cock-fighting and buffalo-fighting and so on; and his ministers pleaded with him that he was devoting too much time to sport and not enough to the government of his people; but he still sported. So they went to a wizard who lived on the top of Mount Kora-rata-una, and the wizard made a great seven-weeks magic and turned all the king's sons—he had some four hundred of them—into ponies and cocks and buffaloes.

But the unregenerate king went right on sporting and traveled extensively throughout his dominions fighting all the cocks and buffaloes and racing all the ponies he could find; and by their characteristics he recognized one by one his sons and took them to another wizard who made a great magic and turned them back into usable young men again. And, behold the miracle, the king, in traveling so extensively amongst his people had learned to know exactly what were their manifold needs, and his government thereafter was wise and just in the extreme.

P'raps you can use this story for your theme. As it is rendered in the local open-air theaters a considerable element of humor and shrewd observation of human nature is injected into the play by the delineation of the grosser characteristics of some of the sons—the coward, for instance, being the fighting cock that runs away; the glutton, the boor, the grouch, and so on accordingly.

As to religion: the Encyclopedia Britannica outline is very concise and tells you quite as much as I know. I might elaborate a little on the meager reference to the simple spirit worship of the mass of the common people by saying that they fill the woods and streams with a host of spirits of the conventional spook or goblin type who are benevolent or spiteful as the local case may be. These elves may be propitiated by offerings or antagonized by any one of a million things that they don't like one to do, such as crossing a certain tree shadow without muttering an invocation to that particular spook who lives in the tree, or washing one's skirt in a pool more than three times without making an offering of pink-dyed rice.

You may safely imagine almost any quaint superstition of a simple-minded people and introduce it *ad lib* into your playlet. The rule for your hero would be, if he is rich, to surround him with a crowd of wives and guards and ministers; if poor, he must be a woodcutter or a tiller of the soil, in which case he must be honest and hard-working and hopelessly in love with the local land-owner's daughter.

I'm sorry I can't quote you more books on the subject; but I just don't know of any in English. If I can add anything to what I have told you, don't hesitate to call upon me. And I wish you luck with the fearful and wonderful thing that your Siamese ballet will be. But don't let the difficulty of getting data discourage you. A little inaccuracy won't prevent it from being, possibly, a very artistic and interesting offering. I wish I could see it.

Be sure to accompany your letter of inquiry with a stamped, addressed envelop. Our Question and Answer Service is free, but experts are not required to reply to letters in which no return postage has been inclosed.

Rifles

HOW to convert an Army rifle into a sporting model. Mr. Wiggins describes two methods of doing this difficult job, one of which has the recommendation of having been used successfully by himself.

Request:—"I am figuring on converting an U. S. Army rifle into a sporting model and would like some pointers.

I have never seen one so converted, but know that it is done. Whatever information you can give me will be appreciated, as I don't want to bungle the job."—R. L. Asbury, Detroit, Mich.

Reply, by Mr. Wiggins:—In converting a Springfield service arm to a sporter, I'd first join the National Rifle Association as an annual member, a blank for which purpose I enclose. Ask for a list of the supplies for sale to members at the same time.

In this list you will find stock, sporting type with short forearm and pistol grip, the buttplate and screws adapted to same.

Having received this stock, remove the rear sight of the rifle, by dismounting the gun, and driving out the traverse pin which holds the rear sight sleeve to the barrel, located on the underside of the barrel, driving it forward with a brass or copper punch. Then have the barrel reblued and polished, and place in the sporting stock, adjust a Lyman or B & M or Howe-Whelan rear sight, and you have a perfectly serviceable rifle.

I, myself, did not remove the rear sight sleeve from my rifle; merely removed the sight itself, by screwing it out to the side, and cut off and polished the sleeve to a nice finish, removed and blued it in a gasoline torch flame, and put it back in place, thus doing away with the abrupt shoulder at barrel and cylinder. I feel proud of the job, too.

A most excellent method, if you wish to do ALL the work yourself, is to order, from the N. R. A. "The Amateur Gunsmith," Col. Whelan's book, and in that you will find complete directions for stock making, etc. Or, you can get Hoffman Arms Co., Ardmore, Oklahoma, to do the job.

Prospecting

APPARENTLY the days when one started out to look for gold with no other equipment than a pick or a pan are now dead. The course of preparation outlined below seems fairly complete.

Request:—"I would like to get a little imformation about mining laws, mining methods and practise, where and how to prospect, how to outfit and general geology necessary for a prospector.

I might try Cal. this winter if I get the chance, if I don't I will try Alaska in the Spring."—Salvatore Dominice, New Britain, Conn.

P.S.—What will an outfit cost, and where is the best place to prospect?

Reply, by Mr. Victor Shaw:—Prospecting needs—besides experience—a knowledge of rocks and of minerals. It is too big a subject for instruction by letter, and so I advise buying a few books and a study of them. Take the books with you on trips into the country (or on your prospecting trips) for reference, and thus have a chance to identify the rocks from descriptions.

The method of prospecting is fairly simple and is followed in a general way for all mineral. Hunt first for an area where two different kinds of rock join—say, a granite and a slate, that is an eruptive and a sedimentary rock. Then hunt for a vein of quartz along that juncture, and when finding such a vein, hunt along its course for mineral, like gold and silver, copper, lead, etc. Fragments broken from such a vein and scattered down-hill below it, sometimes for miles, is called "float." If you find quartz float containing mineral, follow that kind *up-hill* till you arrive at the vein. Streams are always good places to hunt for float, because they carry down fragments of quartz from any vein above which crosses the stream, or perhaps crops in the slope on either side.

Placer gold is traced in much the same way. If you pan colors, keep panning up-stream watching for more in each pan. The supply should increase toward the source of supply; and in time you may arrive at a point where all colors cease. Your deposit is then at bed-rock under where the last colors occurred, or up the banks on either side. Remember, however, that float gold may be carried for many miles down a stream, or may be in small amounts below some vein bearing gold, and there may be no regular placer deposit; all the float-colors coming from the vein.

Watch the beaches of streams, lakes, or sea shore, for quartz float. Also rock- and snow-slides, bare cliffs, etc., for veins.

One good book is Horace West's "The Miner's Guide," published at 340 Wilcox Bldg., Los Angeles, Calif. Also you need Wilson's Mining Law of the States, at same address.

For California, write to Bureau of Mines, Ferry Bldg., San Francisco.

Alaska has been described by me in several letters published by *Adventure* from time to time. You can also get information by sending to The Director of the U. S. Geological Survey, Washington, D. C., for free Bulletin No. 722, on Alaska Mines & Mining. Prospecting up here requires a boat for traveling—in the states, you mostly use pack animals. Fare up here from Seattle is $34.00 to Ketchikan, our center of fisheries and mining. You might send to the Ketchikan *Chronicle*, for copy of their recently-issued "Fisheries Edition," which describes not only the fishing but also mining, and every other industry.

TWENTY new sections will be found in the list of experts which follows, in abbreviated form, on the next two pages, and we are arranging to add still more until we shall be prepared to answer questions on all outdoor activities the world around. A list of sections needing experts will be found at the end of the geographical division on page 103. If you think you can qualify as an Ask Adventure expert, we shall be glad to discuss the matter with you. We shall be glad also to receive any suggestions about the department and its work. Address JOSEPH COX, care *Adventure*.

Our experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.
2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.
3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.
4. **Cover Your Ground**—Make questions definite. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

The Sea Part 1 *American Waters.*—Beriah Brown, Coupeville, Wash.

The Sea Part 2 *Statistics of American Shipping.*—Harry E. Rieseberg, Apartment 347-A, Kew Gardens, Washington, D. C.

The Sea Part 3 *British Waters.*—Captain A. E. Dingle, care *Adventure.*

Islands and Coasts *Islands of Indian and Atlantic Oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits.*—Captain A. E. Dingle, care *Adventure.*

Hawaii Dr. Neville Whymant, 345 West 23rd St., New York City.

Philippine Islands Buck Connor, L. B. 4., Quartzsite, Ariz.

Borneo Capt. Beverley Giddings, care of *Adventure.*

★ **New Guinea** L. P. B. Armit, Port Moresby, Territory of Papua, *via* Sydney, Australia.

★ **New Zealand, Cook Islands, Samoa** Tom L. Mills, *The Feilding Star,* Feilding, New Zealand.

★ **Australia and Tasmania** Phillip Norman, 842 Military Rd., Mosman, Sydney, N. S. W., Australia.

Asia Part 1 *Siam, Andamans, Malay Straits, Straits Settlements, Shan States and Yunnan.*—Gordon MacCreagh, 21 East 14th St., New York.

Asia Part 2 *Cochin China.*—Dr. Neville Whymant, 345 West 23rd St., New York City.

Asia Part 3 *Southern and Eastern China.*—Dr. Neville Whymant, 345 West 23rd St., New York City.

Asia Part 4 *Western China.*—Capt. Beverly Giddings, care *Adventure.*

★ **Asia Part 5** *North China, Mongolia and Chinese Turkestan.*—George W. Twomey, M. D., 60 Rue de l'Amirauté, Tientsin, China.

Asia Part 6 *Japan.*—Sidney Herschel Small, San Raphael, Calif.

Asia Part 7 *Korea.*—Dr. Neville Whymant, 345 West 23rd St., New York City.

Asia Part 8 *Coast of Northeastern Siberia, and Adjoining Waters.*—Capt. C. L. Oliver, care *Adventure.*

Asia Part 9 *Arabia, Persia, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Borneo.*—Captain Beverley Giddings, care *Adventure.*

Turkey J. F. Edwards, David Lane, E. Hampton, N. Y.

Africa Part 1 *Egypt.*—Dr. Neville Whymant, 345 West 23rd St., New York City.

✠ **Africa Part 2** *Sudan.*—W. T. Moffat, Opera House, Southport, Lancashire, England.

Africa Part 3 *Tripoli.*—Captain Beverley Giddings, care *Adventure.*

Africa Part 4 *Tunis and Algeria.*—Dr. Neville Whymant, 345 West 23rd St., New York City.

Africa Part 5 *Morocco.*—George E. Holt, care *Adventure.*

Africa Part 6 *Sierra Leone to Old Calabar, West Africa, Southern and Northern Nigeria.*—W. F. Collins, care *Adventure.*

★ **Africa Part 7** *Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East, Uganda and the Upper Congo.*—Charles Beadle, La Roseraie, Cap d'Ail (Alpes Maritimes), France.

Atrica Part 8 *Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand.*—Captain F. J. Franklin, Gulfport and Coast Enquiry Depot, Turnbull Bldg., Gulfport, Miss.

✠ **Africa Part 9** *Portuguese East.*—R. G. Waring, Corunna, Ontario, Canada.

Europe Part 1 *Jugo-Slavia and Greece.*—Lieut. William Jenna, Fort Clayton, Panama, C. Z.

Europe Part 2 *Albania.*—Robert S. Townsend, 1447 Irving St., Washington, D. C.

Europe Part 3 *Finland, Lapland and Russia.*—Aleko E. Lilius, care *Adventure.*

Europe Part 4 *Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Hungary.*—Theodore von Keller, 135 Waverly Place, New York City.

Europe Part 5 *Scandinavia.*—Robert S. Townsend, 1447 Irving St., Washington, D. C.

✠ **Europe Part 6** *Great Britain.*—Thomas Bowen Partington, Constitutional Club, Northumberland Ave., W. C. 2, London, England.

South America Part 1 *Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile.*—Edgar Young, care *Adventure.*

South America Part 2 *Venezuela, the Guianas and Brazil.*—Paul Vanorden Shaw, 21 Claremont Ave., New York, N. Y.

South America Part 3 *Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay.*—William R. Barbour, care *Adventure.*

Central America *Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala.*—Charles Bell Emerson, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif.

West Indies Part 1 *Haiti, Santo Domingo, Porto Rico, Virgin and Jamaica Groups.*—Charles Bell Emerson, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif.

West Indies Part 2 *Cuba.*—Wallace Montgomery, Warner Sugar Co. of Cuba, Miranda, Oriente, Cuba.

Mexico Part 1 *Northern. Border States of Old Mexico—Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas.*—J. W. Whiteaker, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex.

Mexico Part 2 *Southern and Lower California. Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan.*—C. R. Mahaffey, Box 304, San José, Calif.

Mexico Part 3 *Southeastern. Federal Territory of Quintana Roo and states of Yucatan and Campeche.*—W. Russell Sheets, 301 Popular Ave., Takoma Park, Md.

Newfoundland C. T. James, Bonaventure Ave., St. Johns, Newfoundland.

Baffinland and Greenland Victor Shaw, Box 958, Ketchikan, Alaska.

Canada Part 1 *New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island.*—Fred L. Bowden, 54 Mason Avenue, Binghamton, New York.

Canada Part 2 *Southeastern Quebec.*—Jas. F. B. Belford, Codrington, Ont., Canada.

✠ **Canada Part 3** *Height of Land, Region of Northern Quebec and Northern Ontario (except Strip between Minn. and C. P. Ry.); Southeatern Ungava and Keewatin.*—S. E. Sangster ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada.

✠ **Canada Part 4** *Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario.*—Harry M. Moore, Deseronto, Ont., Canada.

✠ **Canada Part 5** *Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario.*—A. D. L. Robinson, 115 Huron St., Walkerville, Ont., Canada.

Canada Part 6 *Hunters Island and English River District.*—T. F. Phillips, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn.

✠ **Canada Part 7** *Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and Northern Keewatin.*—Reece H. Hague, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada.

Canada Part 8 *Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta.*—C. Plowden, Plowden Bay, Howe Sound, B. C.

Canada Part 9 *The Northw. Ter. and the Arctic. General questions on this territory, especially Ellesmere Land, Baffinland, Melville and North Devon Islands, North Greenland and the half-explored islands west of Ellesmere. Royal Canadian Mounted Police.*—Patrick Lee, Tudor Hall, Elmhurst, Long Island.

Alaska Theodore S. Solomons, 5647 Lexington Ave., Hollywood, Calif.

★ *(Enclose addressed envelop with International Reply Coupon for five cents.)*
✠ *(Enclose addressed envelop with International Reply Coupon for three cents.)*

Western U. S. Part 1 *Calif., Ore., Wash., Nev., Utah and Ariz.*—E. E. Harriman, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles. Calif.

Western U. S. Part 2 *New Mexico.*—H. F. Robinson, 200-202 Korber Block, Albuquerque, N. M.

Western U. S. Part 3 *Colo. and Wyo.*—Frank Earnest, Sugar Loaf, Colo.

Western U. S. Part 4 *Mont. and the Northern Rocky Mountains.*—Fred W. Egleston, Bozeman, Mont.

Western U. S. Part 5 *Idaho and Surrounding Country.*—R. T. Newman, Box 833, Anaconda, Mont.

Western U. S. Part 6 *Tex. and Okla.*—J. W. Whiteaker, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex.

Middle Western U. S. Part 1 *The Dakotas, Neb., Ia., Kan.*—Joseph Mills Hanson, care *Adventure.*

Middle Western U. S. Part 2 *Mo. and Ark. Also the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa.*—John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

Middle Western U. S. Part 3 *Ind., Ill., Mich., Wis., Minn. and Lake Michigan.*—John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

Middle Western U. S. Part 4 *Mississippi River, Routes.*—Geo. A. Zerr, Vine and Hill Sts., Crafton P. O., Ingram, Pa.

Middle Western U. S. Part 5 *Great Lakes.*—H. C. Gardner, 3302 Daisy Ave., Cleveland, Ohio.

Eastern U. S. Part 1 *Adirondacks, New York; Lower Miss. (St. Louis down), Atchafalaya across La. swamps, St. Francis River, Arkansas Bottoms, North and East Shores of Lake Mich. Transcontinental and other auto-trail tours (Lincoln, National, Old Santa Fé, Yellowstone, Red Ball, Old Spanish Trail, Dixie Highway, Ocean to Ocean, Pike's Peak).* —Raymond S. Spears, Inglewood, Calif.

Eastern U. S. Part 2 *Southern Appalachians, Alleghanies, Blue Ridge, Smokies, Cumberland Plateau, Highland Rim.*—William R. Barbour, care *Adventure.*

Eastern U. S. Part 3 *Tenn., Ala., Miss., N. and S. C., Fla. and Ga. Except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard.*—Hapsburg Liebe, care *Adventure.*

Eastern U. S. Part 4 *Maryland.*—Lawrence Edmund Allen, 201 Bowery Ave., Frostburg, Md.

Eastern U. S. Part 5 *Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I. and Mass.*—Howard R. Voight, 108 Hobart St., New Haven, Conn.

Eastern U. S. Part 6 *Maine. For all territory west of the Penobscot river.*—Dr. G. E. Hathorne, 70 Main Street, Bangor, Me.

Eastern U. S. Part 7 *Eastern Maine. For all territory east of the Penobscot River.*—H. B. Stanwood, East Sullivan, Me.

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

Canoeing Edgar S. Perkins, 5742 Stony Island Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Yachting Beriah Brown, Coupeville, Wash., or Henry W. Rubinkam, Chicago Yacht Club, Box 507, Chicago, Ill.

Motor Boating George W. Sutton, 6 East 45th St., New York City.

Motor Camping John D. Long, 1133 Broadway, New York City.

Motor Vehicles Edmund B. Neil, care *Adventure.*

All Shotguns, *including foreign and American makes; wing shooting.* John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers, *including foreign and American makes.*—Donegan Wiggins, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

Hiking Claude P. Fordyce, M. D., Falls City, Neb.

First Aid on the Trail Claude P. Fordyce, M. D., Falls City, Neb.

Health-Building Outdoors Claude P. Fordyce, M. D., Falls City, Neb.

Camp Cooking Horace Kephart, Bryson, N. C.

Mining and Prospecting Victor Shaw, Box 958, Ketchikan, Alaska.

Forestry in the United States Ernest W. Shaw, South Carver, Mass.

Tropical Forestry William R. Barbour, care *Adventure.*

Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada R. T. Newman, Box 833, Anaconda, Mont.

Aviation Lieut.-Col. W. G. Schauffler, Jr., 2940 Newark St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

Army Matters, United States and Foreign Lieut. Glenn R. Townsend, Fort Snelling, Minn.

Navy Matters Lieut. Francis Greene, U. S. N. R., 241 Eleventh Street, Brooklyn, N. Y.

State Police Francis H. Bent, Jr., care *Adventure.*

Horses Thomas H. Dameron, 911 S. Union Ave., Pueblo, Colo.

Photography Paul L. Anderson, 36 Washington St., East Orange, New Jersey, or Sigismund Bluman, Claus Spreckels Bldg., San Francisco, Calif.

American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal Arthur Woodward, Museum of American Indians, 155th St. and Broadway, N. Y. City.

Herpetology Dr. G. K. Noble, American Museum of Natural History, 77th St. and Central Park West, New York, N. Y.

Entomology Dr. Frank E. Lutz, Ramsey, N. J.

Stamps H. A. Davis, The American Philatelic Society. 3421 Colfax Ave., Denver, Colo.

Coins and Medals Howland Wood, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th St., New York City.

Radio Donald McNicol, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J.

SPORTS

Track Jackson Scholz, 73 Farmington Ave., Long Meadow, Mass.

Tennis Fred Hawthorne, Sports Dept., New York *Herald Tribune*, New York City.

Basketball Joe F. Carr, 16 E. Broad St., Columbus, Ohio.

Bicycling Arthur J. LeaMond, 469 Valley St., South Orange, New Jersey.

Skating Frank Schreiber, 2226 Clinton Ave., Berwyn, Ill.

Skiing and Snowshoeing W. H. Price, 160 Mance St., Montreal, Quebec.

Experts are wanted to cover
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Guinea
Abyssinia
Bulgaria
Roumania
Holland
Belgium
France
Switzerland
Italy
Spain
Portugal and Denmark.
Address Joseph Cox, care *Adventure.*

A News Bulletin *of Outdoor Equipment and Commodities*

STRAIGHT GOODS

TESTED BY OUR EXPERTS

PERHAPS the most satisfying feature about this business of editing *Adventure* is the knowledge that it's not a thing we are doing alone. When our readers, for instance, heard of the contemplated changes in the magazine, the number of letters we received containing suggestions and criticisms surprized even those of us who have been helped many times by the cooperation of *Adventure* fans.

The most interesting note in the large number of letters, which came in before and after the first issue of the new *Adventure* appeared, was the "develop departments" idea. We were surprized to find that, even before we introduced several of the new departments, many readers had conceived the idea and suggested plans that we can use to great advantage. "Straight Goods" for instance. From an Army Major in the far west comes a letter that contains among other suggestions an interesting paragraph on advertisements, describing practically what our news bulletin on equipment will be:

> Put about ten pages in the back of the book limited to those firms who cater to the vital needs of hunters, explorers and wilderness travelers. Only the firms with the reputation of having the best goods of the kind in the world should be allowed within the covers. These advertisements should cover the range of equipments, food, clothing, arms, ammunition, boats, canoes and transportation in general. * * * Things that real men want for real wilderness needs and that they may bank on in a pinch of life or death as being honest to gosh *ALL THERE!!*—D. R.

And that's exactly the sort of department Straight Goods is to be—only it will function as an editorial service and *not* through advertisements. The products being tested by Ask Adventure experts are given absolutely unbiased reports and whether or not a manufacturer advertises in *Adventure* does not affect this policy. If he has a new model or features anything of interest to our readers the Straight Goods news bulletin will tell you about it.

In a letter from the other side of the continent a friend outlines Straight Goods practically as we had planned it:

> Let's have a department to give us news and opinions of new products. If a manufacturer brings out a new car, gun, boat or what not, let him submit a sample to the expert in that line and then let that expert pass on to us first his technical description of the product and second his personal reaction to it. It's an attractive idea to me and I believe we would enjoy such articles whether or not we happened to agree with the conclusions the expert drew from his own technical description. I for one would admire to see Donegan Wiggins on a new model automatic pistol.—C. H. L.

For this comrade's information we may add that one of the first reports—which will begin in the January issues—will be Donegan Wiggins' on new firearms. Mr. Wiggins at this writing is visiting the east especially to look into new developments in his field and he is going to have something interesting to say. Invited by the leading ammunition and firearms manufacturers to study the processes of their factories and examine their plans for new features, he is now preparing a report for Straight Goods that will tell the news to *Adventure* readers as soon as the new models are distributed.

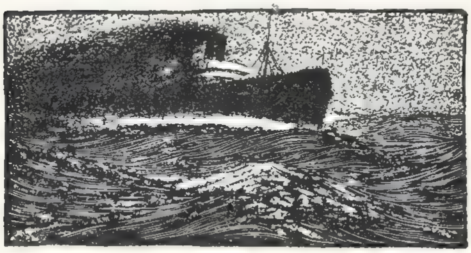
Another letter carries the same question:

> Can you not utilize the splendid corps of woodsmen, campers, et al., in your fold to give real tests and a mark of approbation to such equipment as you show in your advertisements that may pass the test and permit readers to purchase with confidence?
> —K. H. W.

And there are many more letters than we have space for this time. Some give practical suggestions for running Straight Goods that we can use to good advantage. The important thing is that there is a general demand for such a department and it is gratifying to know that we are going ahead along the lines suggested by our readers and people whom we want to keep as readers. If you have further suggestions or criticisms send them along. We want you to build this department into one that interests you and the only way you can do it is to tell us what equipment you would like to see tested and anything else you want to see in the organization that will help you most. We might add that we have received some letters violently opposing the plan because we "will sell out to our advertisers." To those we have received and to any we may receive we can only reply that we have always been considered pretty honest and when we say the tests will be impartial we mean it. Sixteen years of proof that *Adventure's* editorial policy is independent and unbiased is certainly of some value in backing up this statement. So—stand by till the first reports come.

ADVENTURE'S TRAVEL ASSOCIATION

A Service Organization with Stations and Experts all over the World



ADVENTURE'S TRAVEL ASSOCIATION is on its way. It is not where it will be in a year or even a month from now, because every day brings new developments in the extensive plan which we have sketched for you in the past two months. But we are in a position now to give service in the way of information and suggestions, for any trip you plan in the near future—short or long. Our geographical experts, as you know, are already equipped to give you thorough information on the territories they cover and you can write directly to any one listed under the Questions and Answers section of Ask Adventure.

Also the main office here in New York is prepared to tell you what route to take, where to stay, and will give you sources of information on any part of the world you want to visit. It is necessary, of course, that you tell us definitely what trip you are planning and enclose the usual stamped, addressed envelope for our reply.

This is only one feature of the travel organization we are developing. As we have announced before, stations are being opened all over the world and we are cooperating with every government and worthwhile factor in the travel field. Membership in the Association will be open to our readers within a few months but until all the facilities of the Association can be offered, the central information office at *Adventure* headquarters is glad to help travelers who are contemplating a trip in the near future.

The traveler who wants help on travel facilities, hotels, information bureaus, booklets, etc., can get it from us here at headquarters. The adventurer who is off to faraway regions little known to the average man can get very definite and absolutely up-to-date information from the Ask Adventure experts.

This service, however valuable we may make it, is of course only the nucleus of the larger Association which is going ahead rapidly; the Association in which *Adventure* will act as a clearing house for government bureaus, steamship lines, railroads, touring clubs; with, in addition, its own stations and experts all over the world. The complete prospectus of this Association with our report of progress will be published in the January issues of *Adventure*, so that you can get a picture of the entire plan. Let us know what you think of it.

Verdicts by Adventure *as to the authoritativeness, reliability and authenticity of fact-material, local color and general soundness of current non-fiction*

BOOKS *you can* Believe

Given by Experts having first-hand Knowledge of the Material involved

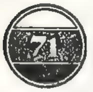
THIS department offers a unique service. Dealing with only non-fiction books, it passes solely on the reliability of the fact-material contained therein, answering the question "Is this book authoritative, trustworthy and of importance?" Brief judgment is passed by our staff of over one hundred specialists, each an expert in his particular field. Only books dealing with the field of outdoor activities are considered, but that field ranges all the way from fishing to entomology, from travel to anthropology. While reviewing new books as issued, the department will also take up older books that are worth while. (Note that most of our "Ask Adventure" experts have compiled careful bibliographies on their respective fields, sent free to readers if stamped and addressed return envelope is enclosed.)

THE MAN-EATERS OF TSAVO, Patterson, Macmillan.—A sound story of life in the pioneer days of British East Africa (now Kenya Colony) told with unpretentious simplicity. Excellent photos and interesting details of native customs.—CHARLES BEADLE.

MY AFRICAN NEIGHBOURS, Hans Coudenhove, Little Brown.—A profound book on Africa by a man who abandoned civilization at thirty-five to spend thirty-eight years with his friends, the animals of the wild among whom he died. His sympathetic studies of mongooses, lions, ants, kites, ravens, snakes, etc., place him as a mental brother of Burroughs, Hudson. A book to reread and study. Has excellent photo studies.—CHARLES BEADLE.

TRAVEL AND ADVENTURE IN MANY LANDS, by Cecil Gosling, E. P. Dutton and Co., New York, 1926.—Unreliable for the most part so far as Latin-American details are concerned. I can't swallow that one where the snake milked the woman and then put its tail in the child's mouth to deceive it. Many of the others strain credulity as much as this one. I am surprized that E. P. Dutton has printed this book.—EDGAR YOUNG.

THE VENTURE BOOK, by Elinor Mordaunt, The Century Co., New York and London.—Mrs. Mordaunt has written a travelog of the South Sea Islands in the right manner. She wrote, as she did her drawing, on the spot. Therefore, the reader gets exactness and accuracy such as never come when the narratives are "written up" at the journey's end. That is the special feature of the book. A very sane, solid and satisfying impression of just a little bit of the vast South Sea Islands area, gathered within three months.—TOM L. MILLS.



Camp-Fire Buttons—To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Butterick Publishing Company, *not* to any individual.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

WILL SELL: Complete file from May 1911 to March 1920 in good condition. Best offer takes lot.—H. S., Pettee Inn, Newton Upper Falls, Mass.

WANTED: Copy of the issue of July 10th, 1923. Write—HARRY LANCETTE, St. Clair P. O., St. Paul, Minn.

Forwarding Mail—This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung—This department appears in alternate issues of the magazine.

Identification Cards—Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

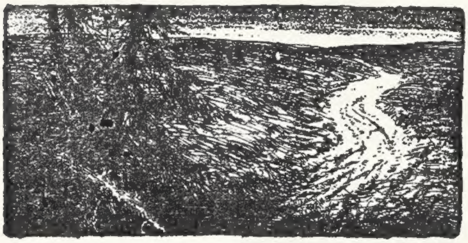
In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application*. We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you *post-paid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Butterick Publishing Company, *not* to any individual.

Lost Trails

We offer this service free of charge to readers who wish to get in touch with old friends from whom the years have separated them. All inquiries of this sort received by us, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with the inquirer's name. We reserve the right, in case the inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any number or other name, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and in general to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. For the benefit of the friend you seek, give your own name when possible. Give also your own full address. We will forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal Star *to give additional publicity in their "Missing Relative Column" weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred. Full lists of those unfound are reprinted semiannually.*



FARR, WILLIAM GOEBEL. Please come home. The children beg for you. Your wife—Mrs. W. G. Farr, 254 E. Pearl, Jackson, Miss.

STUTTS, WILLIAM ALLEN. Last heard of in California in '23. Scar on back of head. Please write to me, or any one knowing his present whereabouts write Glenn C. Turner, Hqrs. Btry., 12th F. A., Ft. Sam Houston, Texas.

GAYLE, LOWELL. Please come to Melrose or write me.—Fanny.

CONNOLLY, JOHN and John Sullivan who served in the U. S. Navy on the *Raleigh* from 1902 to 1906 with John E. Petrie (correct name—William E. Petrie). Please write at once—W. E. Petrie, Brattleboro, R. F. D. No. 3, Vermont.

MOORE, HENRY J. Last heard of in Port Arthur, Texas. Carpenter, cement worker and brakeman. Write sister Bertha, Box 394, Lincoln, Ill.

BUTTERWORTH, ROBERT H. Last heard from about twenty years ago when he set out for Oklahoma City. Would like to hear from him. Any information as to his whereabouts will be greatly appreciated by his sister.—Miss Ady T. Butterworth, Halcyon, San Luis Obispo Co., California.

TEXAS ROADS or FRANK JONES. If you happen to see this it's from your buddy "Ike" who would like to hear from you. I'm back at school. Address—Martin Sucher, 710 Ave. "P," Brooklyn, New York.

STAPLER, JOHN R. Master Mariner, Steam. Last heard of sailing out of Norfolk. Wish to reestablish communication. Address—B. M. Salmon, Masonic Temple, El Dorado, Ark.

ORLANDER, SVEN. "A. B." Last heard of on Gulf Export & Transporation Co., boats out of Beaumont, Texas. Wish to reestablish communication. Any information or address will be appreciated. Address—B. M. Salmon, Masonic Temple, El Dorado, Ark.

GORDON or GARDNER, S. H. Please write home to let the folks know how you are so they don't have to worry or write me. Archie.

FAIRBAIRN, JOHN GOODBOURN. Please let me hear from you soon. Your brother has died since you left in 1924 and I want you. Address—Mrs. Fairbairn, 17 Caron Ave., Wrightville, Hull, Quebec, Canada.

"ED BOY." Write to your wife in care of sister at Briston. Dott.

FESTER, GLENN. Formerly a jockey known as "Casey Jones" or "Jockey C. Jones." Last heard of in 1919 from Latonia and Louisville, Ky. Brother and sister would greatly appreciate any information as to his whereabouts. Address—Bernice or Bernard Fester, 584 So. Vine Street, Denver, Colo.

S. R. V. J. Last heard of in Alaska. Your old S. S. Friend has news for you. Write—L. A. B., care of *Adventure.*

GEORGE Mc. Please come home. Am waiting for you. Need you. Love from "M.", 304.

ROSS, LOUIS L. Last seen in Los Angeles in December, 1925. Knowledge of his whereabouts would be greatly appreciated.—G. W. Henderson, Box 36, Cajon, San Bernardino Co., California.

HAYS, ELIJAH H. Last seen in Los Angeles in December, 1925. Information as to his whereabouts would be greatly appreciated. Address—G. W. Henderson, Box 36, Cajon, San Bernardino Co., California.

MONGEAU, LAWRENCE. Last heard of in Montreal, Canada, Jan., 1923. Would like to hear from him or of his whereabouts. Address—Jack Cournoyer or J. Alphee, U. S. N. A. S. Coco Solo, C. Z.

RING, ISABELLE R. (Née Isabelle Jones.) Married A. Ring, June 7, 1916. Any one knowing whereabouts please communicate with Mrs. L. M. Ring, care of Red Cross, Naval Hospital, San Diego, Calif.

RING, ALBERT. Also known as Jimmie on U. S. S. *Colorado* in 1915-16; U. S. S. *San Diego*, 1916-17; old shipmates please communicate with Mrs. L. M. Ring, care of Red Cross, Naval Hospital, San Diego, Calif.

JOE. It is more of a tragedy than D— has been able to comprehend that you should tell him over the phone that "Daddy will be home tomorrow" and then never come. Your children need you more than you can realize, as conditions here are very detrimental to them and they need necessities. Address me at L.—Their Mother.

PIPPIN, LEE. Was last heard from Rock Island, Ill., Dec. 3, 1925. Any information will be appreciated by his mother. Address—Mrs. Mary Pippin, Bowman, North Dakota.

THE following have been inquired for in either the October 23d, 1926 or the November 23d, 1926 issues of Adventure. They can get the names and addresses of the inquirer from this magazine.

APPEL, MATT, J.; Berkowitz, Meyer; Brown, Ben or Big Ben; Calvert, Earle; Carney, Vincent; Cooke, William; Daniels, Conley or Conn; Dettmerhing, Earnest; Evans, Llewelyn; Faldowski, Edward; Gideon, James; Gillmore, James H.; Gray, Frank; Gray, Katherine; Hausner, Stanlius; Jack, Louis N.; Jamison, Hill; Jensen, Sinar; Landry, James Edward; Langhaar, Jack; Langshaw, Robert Henry; O'Brien, Claude Francis; Old Timers of days of Empire in Philippines on Panay; Ovenden, Mrs. Dorothy Cornish; Parce, Fremont A.; Parkhurst, Guy; Peck, Lewis M.; Peterson, (son) Polley, James J.; Rider, Stanley F.; River, Fred; Rosenberg, Leo; Rowbotham, Cyril K.; Seeger, Adolf; Seeley, James Howey; Skerratt, Fred; Smithett or Roderman, William Melvine; Traversy, A. J. (Bert); Van Houten, Lynn C.; Vincent, Donald; Williams, James; Windross, Raymond H.

The Trail *Ahead*

The next issue of ADVENTURE, *December 31st*
will be a Special Issue—*see note at bottom of page*

Beginning a *New Serial*

The Fighting Years

By Hugh Pendexter

When *Justin Nolton*, woodsman and scout extraordinary, set out for Path Valley to find the French spy he went with a heavy heart, for had not pretty *Elizabeth Joy* flouted him for scarlet-uniformed *Ensign Petny?* And *Petny*, along with his mysteriously stupid aide *Fincer* and *Richard Arlington*, the cheerful stranger from Old England, was to be *Nolton's* companion on the expedition.

A *Complete Novel*

Two Fares East

By W. C. Tuttle

Sheriff Joe Rich was going to get married, but his enemies seemed to keep a jump ahead of him. The boys of the Flying H backed his play, but the cards wouldn't fall right until *Hashknife* and *Sleepy* postponed their trip East and dealt the last hand.

A *Complete Novelette*

The Last Legion

A Story of the Gray Maiden

By Arthur D. Howden Smith

Her government in the hands of weaklings, her borders policed by fair-haired Franks, Rome was but a shadow, a thing of shame to her few faithful adherents. Then came a call for help from the far isle of Britain, where a Roman legion, forgotten but loyal still, defended themselves with the aid of the proud unconquerable sword *Gray Maiden*.

Good Short Stories *by favorite Adventure authors:* Sidney Herschel Small, J. D. Newsom, Lewis J. Rendel, John Webb, Sam C. Dunham.

ANNOUNCEMENT: The next issue of *Adventure*, that of December 31st, will be a special issue. It will appear on December 8th. After that *Adventure* will be issued on the first and fifteenth of each month, and will appear on the day of date. Read the notice at the bottom of page 191.

Why Whiskers Flourished in '49

IN THOSE adventurous days, "close shaves" bore no relation to man's hirsute adornment. There were hardships aplenty, without adding the discomforts of a shave, only slightly removed from the early Indian method of pulling 'em out by the roots.

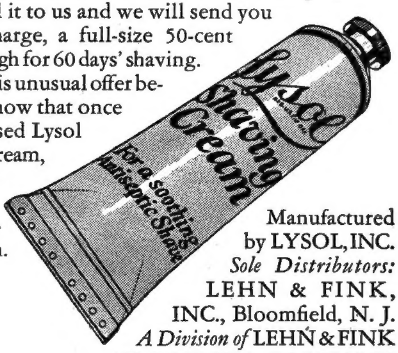
Today the gold seekers rush across the country on the Twentieth Century and shaving is accomplished with equal speed and luxury—particularly by those who have experienced the soothing efficiency of Lysol Shaving Cream.

It quickly softens the toughest beard. It contains just the right amount of the famous antiseptic Lysol to make it soothing and healing. It protects the skin when torn or cut by the razor and guards against infection.

Lysol Shaving Cream is antiseptic without the slightest irritating effect on the skin or any unpleasant odor. It is the ideal shaving cream for health, convenience and comfort.

Full Size Tube Free

Fill in your name and address on the coupon below, mail it to us and we will send you without charge, a full-size 50-cent tube—enough for 60 days' shaving. We make this unusual offer because we know that once you have used Lysol Shaving Cream, you will never want to be without it again.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For a soothing antiseptic Shave

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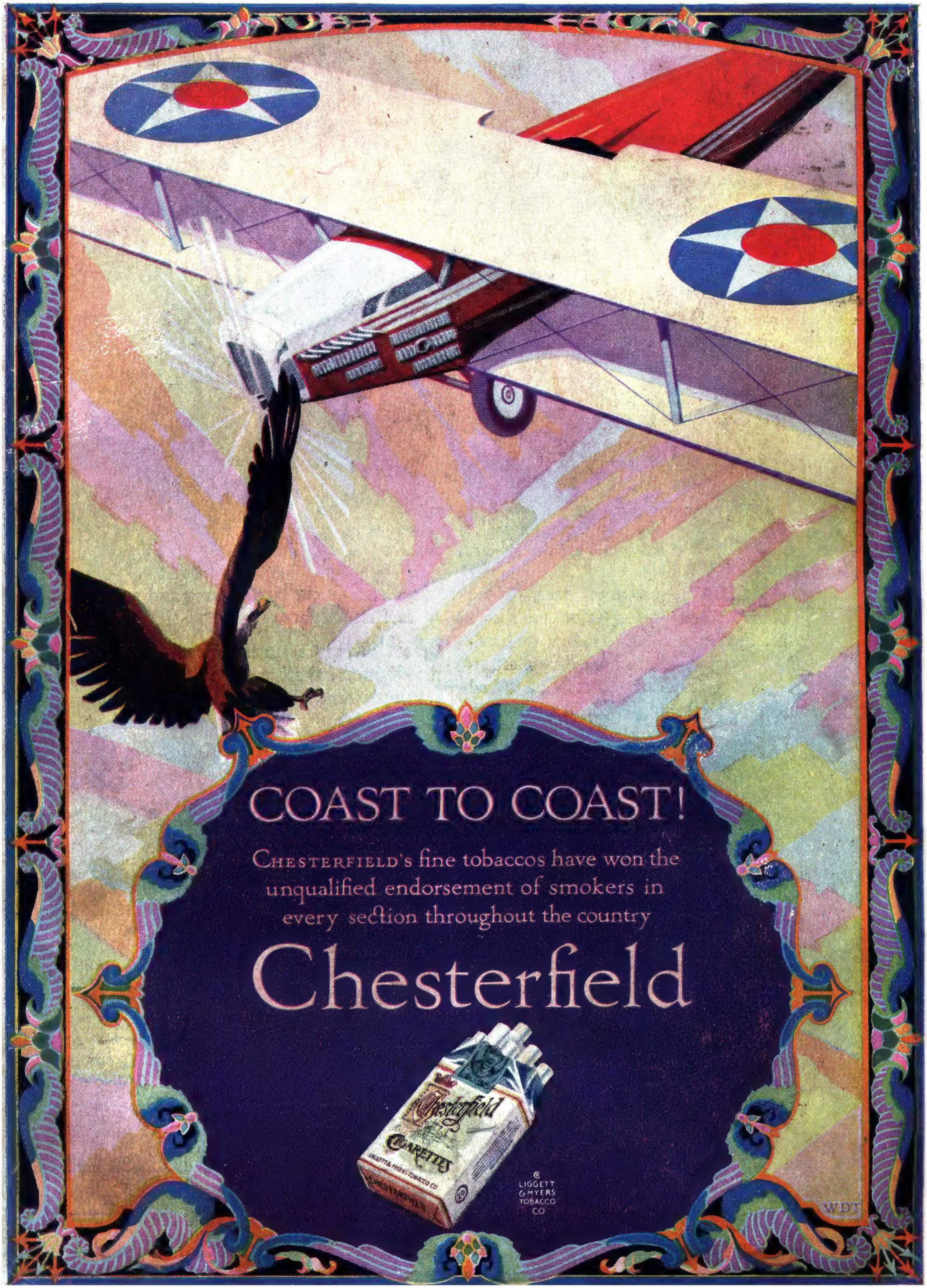

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